

Published September 4th, 2019

## La Finestra Ristorante shares stuffed bell pepper recipe

By Susie Iventosch



Yellow bell peppers stuffed with risotto and Bolognese sauce Photo Susie Iventosch

Our publisher, Andy Scheck, tipped me off about some amazing stuffed yellow bell peppers that were recently served as a special at La Finestra Ristorante of Moraga. Apparently there were only 20 of these delicious nuggets available, and Andy felt lucky to have one of them. With garden harvests in full swing, I thought it would be a wonderful recipe for using homegrown bell peppers. Chef and owner, Jeff Assadi, was kind enough to share how he makes this dish for our readers. This isn't the first time he's been willing to do this. We featured his Polenta alla Contadina back in May of 2009. That dish, made with sun-dried tomatoes, gorgonzola and wild mushroom sauce is fabulous.

These stuffed peppers are fun to make and very colorful too, but be aware there are a lot of different components. This dish comprises six main elements: risotto, marinara sauce, Bolognese sauce, and the peppers, in addition to grilled eggplant and provolone cheese. You can either use leftover marinara, risotto and

Bolognese sauce to combine for this pepper stuffing, or you can make all of them especially for the stuffed peppers and use the leftovers for spaghetti Bolognese or your favorite risotto dish. For Assadi, the stuffed peppers easily came together, because he always has these dishes as regular menu items.

Some things never change, and in this case Assadi still does not follow recipes, but rather cooks more by feel, so I have taken liberty with his list of ingredients to come up with recipes for the risotto, marinara and Bolognese sauces. There has been one major change for La Finestra, however, and that is a change of location from Lafayette to Moraga. When a fire consumed the entire building where his restaurant and six other businesses were located in July 2017, Assadi was forced to move.

"This was one of the saddest things that ever happened to me," he said. "I put my heart and soul into that place and all of a sudden it was gone in the middle of the night. Even months later, we still didn't know if reconstruction would be a possibility. We were just very happy that no one was hurt."

People were asking Assadi what he planned to do next, because his wish was to keep the name and the cooking style the same, as well as try to keep as many of his employees as possible. There was a fleeting opportunity to open the restaurant at the Moraga Hacienda, but that fell through and finally, in October, he was able to reopen in the old Terzetto Restaurant location in Moraga. Sadly, due to the fire, Assadi lost all the contents of the Lafayette location, including a lovely collection of photographs he'd taken himself. There were some very interesting and beautiful windows from all around the world in that collection, because, after all, La Finestra literally means "the window" in Italian. Even though he no longer has his collection of photos, his new restaurant is nothing but windows . practically every wall is glass, befitting a restaurant named La Finestra!

La Finestra Ristorante

1419 Moraga Way

Moraga, Ca.

(925) 376-4444

There is a banquet room that holds a maximum of 38 with 105 seats in total in the restaurant.

<http://lafinestraristorante.com/>

Yellow Bell Peppers stuffed with Risotto and Bolognese Sauce

(Makes 6 servings)

Bolognese Sauce

INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons olive oil

2 large yellow onions, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 carrots, peeled and diced

2 stalks celery, diced

1 pound very lean ground beef

1 pound ground veal (I added veal)

4-6 tablespoons tomato paste

2 tablespoons minced Italian parsley

2 tablespoons minced fresh basil

2 teaspoons Italian seasoning

Salt & pepper to taste

(My Additions)

1/2 cup wine (red or white)

- 1 cup beef or chicken broth
- 1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes in juice
- 1 cup milk

#### DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in large skillet. Add onions and garlic and cook over medium heat until onions are translucent. Add carrots and celery and continue to cook for a few minutes longer. Add meat to pan and cook until meat is cooked through, chopping to crumble as it cooks. Add remaining herbs, seasoning and tomato paste. At this point, I also added the wine, broth, diced tomatoes in juice. Heat all until very hot. At the very end, add the milk and heat through. This gives the Bolognese that creamy consistency.

#### Peppers

- 6 yellow, red or orange bell peppers, tops and seeds removed

#### Risotto

##### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 cup Arborio rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 3-4 cups chicken broth

##### DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil in large sauce pan. Add onions and garlic and cook over medium heat until onions are translucent. (Shallots are also a great addition here.) Next, add the Arborio rice and cook for just a few minutes, tossing in the oil and onion mixture until rice has a sheen. Stir in wine and allow to cook until it is evaporated. Next, add broth, 1/2 cup at a time, stirring once and then allowing to cook, undisturbed, until liquid is absorbed. Continue with this process until all liquid is used, or rice is al dente. (You may not need all the broth.)

#### Marinara Sauce

##### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 fresh plum tomatoes, diced
- 1 14-ounce can tomato sauce
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons fresh minced basil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup dry red wine (my addition)

##### DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in skillet. Add onion and garlic and cook over medium heat until onions are translucent. (Sound familiar?) Add diced tomatoes and continue to cook until tomatoes soften. Add tomato paste and stir into veggies. Next add canned tomatoes, herbs, salt and pepper. Heat all the way through until just about boiling. Add wine and continue to cook over low heat. Remove from stove and cool to room temperature.

#### Eggplant

- 1 large eggplant
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt & pepper

Slice eggplant and salt both sides. Allow eggplant to sweat for about 30 minutes. Dry off the moisture with a paper towel. Brush with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Now, you can barbecue, broil or bake at 400 F on a baking sheet, until just beginning to soften and turn slightly browned. Remove from heat. Cool and chop.

##### TO ASSEMBLE

Mix about 2 cups risotto, 3 cups Bolognese sauce and chopped eggplant together. Fill cavities of peppers with this mixture. Spread marinara sauce in the bottom of your baking dish and place filled peppers on top of sauce. Cover with foil and bake at 400 F for about 35 minutes or until peppers are tender. Remove foil, place a slice of provolone atop each one, and continue to cook, uncovered until cheese is melted and bubbly. Garnish with parsley and pass extra sauce.



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