

## Food & Wine

### In Vino Veritas

Gentry's Amalia McGibbon investigates an Italian classic in San Francisco, a Wine Country favorite in Sonoma, and chats with one of the Bay Area's caterers and event planners

San Francisco's Il Fornaio exudes sophistication, blending high dining with the comforts of Italian-style family gatherings. Having won a Wine Spectator Award of Excellence every year since 1996, Il Fornaio's devotion to wine is apparent. *Cheers* magazine also recently recognized the restaurant for having the best wine program of any chain in the United States. Il Fornaio's core wine list represents all the premier wine growing regions in Italy, and includes a smaller selection of domestic wines. In addition, the restaurant serves its own label chardonnay produced by a specialty vineyard in California, and a Chianti Classico made in Tuscany.



The dining room at Il Fornaio

The restaurant's ambiance is one of warmth, laughter, and hungry anticipation. We particularly love the cozy courtyard spaces at San Francisco's Il Fornaio that are ideal for events like birthdays, anniversaries, and rehearsal dinners.

Unlike many Italian restaurants, which neglect to distinguish between the various regional cuisines of Italy, Il Fornaio wants to celebrate what makes the food in Puglia, for example, different from the food in Umbria. So every month, as part of its "Festa Regionale," Il Fornaio presents a special menu of food and wine from a chosen province. Standing behind each menu is a single Executive Chef,



hailing from the selected region, who touts his native cuisine as "the best Italy has to offer." From October 3 – 16, you'll get a taste of the food and wine of Sicily at all of the Il Fornaio locations.

If you opt for the regular Il Fornaio menu, I'd recommend starting with the Carciofini al Forno, baby Castroville artichokes filled with bread crumbs, garlic, Calabrian peperoncino, Parmigiano Reggiano, and served with lemon juice, tartar sauce, and Ligurian olive oil. Follow this great introduction of flavors with the Turtei all'Aragosta, ravioli filled with fresh Maine lobster and Il Fornaio bread, topped with a scorzone truffle and shrimp cream sauce. For those with more "Italian-sized" appetites, my friend's Wood-fired rotisserie Petaluma duck with citrus sauce was extremely satisfying and tender from start to finish. Il Fornaio offers a full bar, complete with a wide variety of ports, grappas, and distinctively Italian adaptations of classic cocktails. For every dish, there's a perfect drink and your knowledgeable server will gladly steer you in the right direction. The restaurant clearly considers wine an integral part of Italian dining so, to use their own word, *Salute!* **1265 Battery Street (located in Levi's Plaza), San Francisco, 415.986.0100.**

### Dining at Domaine Chandon

Unlike most supper-time travel, the drive up north to the restaurant at Domaine Chandon is a delight. As the vineyards multiply and the cars disappear, the commute feels much less a schlep and more an added bonus. I, for one, have never begrudged a long →