

Venice in Vegas

Wining and Dining at Canaletto

BY MARILYN LAROCQUE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRITT PIERSON

The sights and sounds of Venice come to life at San Marco Square at The Venetian, with gondoliers serenading in the background and singers musicians, jugglers, stilt walkers and mimes entertaining...and no pigeons!

Seated in the al fresco trattoria at Canaletto, quaffing a sparkling Prosecco or Spumante, glancing about at the towering faux facades, watching the action and the changing brightness of the sky, you're as close to the vaunted ambience of this famous city of canals as you can be without getting on a plane.

With Maurizio Mazzon, executive chef for Il Fornaio, owner of Canaletto, in charge, the menu and wines at Canaletto also reflect the tastes of Italy. He worked in Venice for 12 years and came to the U.S. from there in October 1985.

"I prepared the menu with my heart," he said, "to bring Venetian food to Las Vegas. Many of our dishes are based on Veneto regional cooking."

The extensive menu is in Italian, with English subtitles. "Sieppie nere (arborio rice with scallops, shrimp, calamari, brandy and black squid ink) is served

in every restaurant in Venice," Mazzon asserted. "It has to be very fresh to get the ink. Venetian cuisine is based on seafood, from Greece and the Adriatic sea. We have it shipped in daily.



"Venice is a big island with many small islands," he continued, "San Teramo is famous for artichokes. We add shrimp or crab to make risotto.

"Seasoning is important, too, especially saffron, curry, and paprika. People forget that Venice dominated the sea market for 500 years. They exchanged merchandise for spices. They are part of Italian cuisine. In those times, the most important gift for a marriage was a box with spices because they were so rare.

"The Viennese use shell crab fresh in season and octopus. Baccala, dried cod, *alla Vicentina*, is a very old dish from a city very close to Venice. Calves liver with onions is everywhere in Venice. Spaghetti with lobster is also famous. So is a Grigliata di pesce con polenta (mixed grill of seafood with polenta). Zuppa di pesce alla Chioggia is a seafood stew from a fishing town.

"We also offer a whole fish. In Venice, no one serves fillet. The Italians want to see the whole fish so they know they're getting what they ordered; then it's filleted on the table. A whole fish also cooks better. The skin keeps the juices



Capesnte Gratinato



Zuppa di Pesce alla Chioggiotta

and flavors in the fish. The whole fish can be baked under a salt crust, oven baked with vegetables, or grilled.

“Choices for dessert abound. Gosolessi Veneziani is an assortment of traditional Venetian cookies...all different. Gosolessi means craving,” Mazzon said. “Sgroppino is a mixture of vodka, lemon sorbet, prosecco and a dash of cream. It’s more like a drink. It’s the Italian way to prepare your palate for dessert or the Venetian way to finish your meal. Groppo means knot, like when you eat or drink a lot you become stuffed and the stomach is tied in a knot. Sgroppino unties the knot.

“Of course the menu includes tiramisu. Every town has its version of

tiramisu,” said Mazzon. “The oldest, some 200 years of tradition, comes from Treviso, near Venice. It’s a very simple dessert. My grandmother used grappa in the coffee. Every farmhouse made grappa. The key is to taste the coffee and mascapone cheese, and you have to have a touch of rum.”

To complement Canaletto’s menu, marketing partner Lino Chini has assembled a wide-ranging list of wines from all over Italy, with special focus on the Veneto region. From the traditional aperitif, Prosecco, to the robust, full-bodied reds, it’s an opportunity to enjoy Italian wines with Italian cuisine.

“When in Italy, drink Italian,” he urged.