

Falling for Italy

by Ronald Holden

Don't be upset, but Belltown's trees seem to be rusting. Something to do with annual climate change, according to alarmist liberals, though there's no clear consensus within the scientific community.

Personally, I'm inclined to blame Italy. Just look: October begins with a weekend at Seattle Center called Festa Italiana. If this were Scorsese country, we'd have to wear body armor. Scherzo! A joke! Ouch! No far male, per favore!

Intrepid exploration of Belltown's ristorantes and trattorias is called for. Ground rules: no pizza parlors and no pasta dishes on the "main course" side of the menu. Piatti tipici, real Italian food.

I started out with **Assaggio** to see **Mauro Golmarvi**, the true godfather of Belltown's Italian restaurateurs. "Mangia, beve" he said, kissing me on both cheeks and pulling me inside. Golmarvi has redecorated, adding banquettes and a lighter menu with veal, fish and fewer pasta dishes. My favorite: osso buco. I also recommend their terrific wine list.



A block away at **Isabella**, owner **Tony Kermani** also invited me to taste his version of osso buco, which he makes with a lamb shank and serves over polenta. Sounds intriguing.



Over at **Lampreia**, **Scott Carsberg** is doing his minimalist thing: Italian repertory by way of Asia. *The New York Times* has been loving it lately.

Real Sicilians work at **La Vita è Bella**. **Giuseppe Forte** and **Carino Bonjrada** keep the lively café and pizza parlor separate, like rival siblings. The duo boasts brus-

chette, pannini, crepes, an attentive staff, and long tables along the sidewalk to keep diners very happy.

La Fontana looks lost, tucked away in the courtyard of a brick apartment building. Cozy, you might call it, though it could pass for romantic, with low ceilings and high prices.

On Fifth Avenue, next to the Seattle Glassblowing Studio, sits newcomer **Café Amore**. Owners **Sean** and **Kathy Langan** are refugees from corporate kitchens, and are looking forward to expanding into dinners.

Of course, you could always bail out. And no, I don't mean **The Old Spaghetti Factory**, whose Belltown outpost, I wager, is not patronized by the childless locals. I'm thinking of that big-city standby—takeout. [After all, with just a bit of imagination, Larry's Markets becomes da Lorenzo.]

The priciest item at dinner isn't on your plate but in the bottle beside it, so bring the plate home! Along the way, stop at **Seattle Cellars** and ask **Dave Woods** if he's still got any **Negroamaro Salento**, a deeply flavored wine from Puglia, the province at the heel of Italy's boot, for about ten bucks a bottle. That's the name of the grape, for heaven's sake: **negro amaro**. **Mamma mia!**

Two more openings this month, both heartwarming family stories.

First, there's **Torero's**, the latest outpost in a local chain owned by the **Rodriguez** family, which has taken over **Fandango's** space on First Avenue. Why should Seattle have so many restaurants, nearly 200 by one count, operated by natives of **Cuautla**, a town in Mexico no bigger than Belltown?



[Including those **Jalisco**, **Azteca**, **Las Margaritas** and **Burrito Loco** stores, to name but a few.] The answer, amigo, is a woman named **Lucy Lara de Lopez**, who arrived here from Cuautla four decades ago and changed the way we ate; her relatives, friends and neighbors followed. Is Belltown a good choice for a family-oriented, suburban-neighborhood taqueria? Will report back.

In the meantime, **The Apartment Bistro & Martini Bar**, a creation of Magnolia resident **David Selig**, is finally emerging from the shell of **Lux**. No hurry; David's dad is real estate tycoon **Martin Selig**. The website, promised for mid-summer, still wasn't up at press time.

I've never ridden in Cutie's Death Cab, and not sure I want to...so know I'm not your go-to guy for pop music. My impressions of this year's Bumbershoot are purely gastronomic, and they give me heartburn. Amid the usual ethnic suspects, [Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Thailand, Vietnam, India, all dumbed down for the occasion] I encountered multiple iterations of **Zieglers Bratwurst Haus**, Shishkaberry Skewers, and those quintessentially northwest [yeah, right] festival favorites, Pennsylvania Dutch Funnel Cakes, Philly Cheese Steaks and Calzone. Is it any wonder that my 8-year-old buddy, Keegan, opted for a burger and fries?

One Reel gets to wrap Seattle Center in a chain-link fence and charge you \$25 a day to enter; they shouldn't make you eat junk. And **Tom Douglas** is on their board of directors! C'mon, One Reel! You hired a new music producer this year to refresh the lineup of bands. Next year, hire someone with muscle [**Rocco Spirito? Mario Batali?**] to do the same thing for the grub. ♦



Messenger restaurant reviewer Ronald Holden welcomes news and comments from foodies and feeders alike. Additional dispatches on his weblog, www.cornichon.org



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