

RANDOM LENGTHS

HARBOR INDEPENDENT NEWS



Fine Dining

Filetto Al Barolo as served by Ristrante Da Vinci. Photo by: Terelle Jerricks

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

—Leonardo da Vinci

by: Gretchen Williams Tostrup, Lifestyle & Cuisine Writer

Leonardo da Vinci was the true Renaissance man, centuries ahead of the rest of the world in art, science and engineering. Ristorante da Vinci has taken Leonardo to heart, with ambiance and cuisine to make the old master proud. Da Vinci is perched above the runway at Long Beach Airport with a spectacular view of the airplanes taking off and landing. Leonardo's historic concepts for flight are playfully noted in the restaurant's lighting, reproducing da Vinci's sketches of the early parachute. His artistic vision is everywhere, from the deep cobalt blue of the domed ceiling to the clever high tech reproductions of his most famous works, subtly changing images from time to time.

Da Vinci's talent and innovation are reflected in the restaurant's menu as well. Executive Chef Joseph Gotti is devoted to modern ideas of the organic and sustainable, really a throwback to old country ways of growing fruits and vegetables and raising livestock. He is a regular at local farmer's markets, picking the finest and freshest ingredients. Gotti insists on the same qualities in meats and seafood, requiring free range and organically developed proteins whenever possible. The seasonal nature of the fresh products requires constant change on the menu, with the *prix fix* market menu evolving and changing from week to week. Each visit to Ristorante da Vinci is a new and extraordinary dining experience, revealing Chef Gotti's creativity and passion for his art.

Joseph Gotti grew up in the kitchen of his parent's restaurant and wine shop, starting to help at age 5 by washing wine bottles and collecting corks. He learned while he worked, roasting coffee, serving delicatessen sandwiches and selling wine. "Taste buds develop early in the Italian family" said Gotti. "I learned from childhood the importance of food and wine together, the gathering of friends and family at the table".

Gotti's father was not surprised when Joseph showed an early appreciation for excellent food and wine. "If this is your only vice, drinking fine wine and eating great food, and you can support it, then its okay" said Bill Gotti. Joseph went to culinary school at age 18, and his first job out of school was with Wolfgang Puck at Granita. His natural talent in the kitchen was immediately obvious, and Joseph went on to work for legendary chefs Joachim Splichal, Robert Curry and Michael Cimarusti. He has cooked at renowned La Toque and Etoile (Domaine Chandon) in the Napa Valley and Zucca and the Water Grill in Los Angeles. Before taking the reins at da Vinci, he was the executive chef at Naples in Anaheim, part of Splichal's successful Patina Group. In 2007, Chef Gotti was named Chef of the Year for the entire Patina empire of over 100 restaurants nationwide.

Da Vinci's menu is a study in the riches California has to offer, and the Weekly Farmer's Market Menu is *prix fix* par excellence. Each week, it reflects the best ingredients available, made into original dishes with Italian flair and accompanied by wine pairings designed to compliment each course. Considering the fabulous quality of the

meal and the wines, the \$57 *prix fix* could be the best bargain in the harbor area. A recent Market Menu included an amuse bouche (to amuse the mouth, a tiny bite of the chef's best) of fresh crab meat on a crispy handmade cracker, followed by a lovely salad of baby mesclun greens, port poached pear and pecan crusted creamy goat cheese, dressed with a truffle vinaigrette. The wine was a Wirsching 2007 dry Sylvaner from Germany, an ideal enhancement of flavors. The main course was a *Duetto di Vitello*, pan roasted veal loin served with sautéed mushrooms and roasted garlic potato puree, paired with rustic homemade veal stuffed ravioli, tossed with a white wine sauce. The wine was a Tarrica 2008 limited release Pinot Noir from Monterey County in California. Dolci, or the sweet conclusion, was a warm spiced apple, garnished with the terrific house vanilla gelato. Frogmore Creek 2006 Iced Riesling from Tasmania, Australia, is made from well ripened grapes, frozen on the vine and then crushed to make a beautiful amber dessert wine. As if all this were not enough, petit four of delicate filo with wine poached pear ended the meal with a caress.

Antipasto on the regular menu is a feast in itself, from classic calamari fritti with roasted garlic aioli sauce to carpaccio of beef tenderloin topped with arugula and Pecorino cheese. Live diver scallops make a refreshing *crudo di pesce*, garnished with pomegranate and pumpkin seeds and drizzled with truffle vinaigrette. Mediterranean black mussels give off a fragrant steam, redolent of pancetta, herbs and white wine. Long Island oysters are lightly topped with a cold lemon sabayon.

Salads all speak of the stunning freshness of farmer's market ingredients. Baby spinach with diced spiced pumpkin and candied pine nuts is flavorful with truffled sheep's milk cheese, dressed with apple cider vinaigrette. Tiny baby beets on mesclun greens have goat cheese wrapped in grape ash, tossed in a light vinaigrette dressing. *Insalata di corte* is a refined first cousin to Caesar, grilled hearts of Romaine with a parmesan cheese crisp and creamy anchovy vinaigrette.

Handmade pasta is a sure bet, rustic and close to the old country. Lobster ravioli is stuffed with fresh Maine lobster and tossed in a white wine caper sauce, to wonderful effect. *Tortelloni di zucca*, packed with roasted pumpkin, is sauced with rich pecan pesto and garnished with fresh sage. *Gnocchi Di Napoli* is traditional potato

dumplings with new world red wine braised bison short ribs. *Risotto Di Pesce* is perfectly *al dente* rice with lobster, diver scallops and mussels, with an ochre saffron broth, both beautiful and delicious. The ultimate pasta is *Agnolotti Alla Anatra*, ravioli stuffed with braised duck and *foie gras*, served with a forest mushroom sauce.

Main dishes cover the map, from double cut grilled pork chops with aged balsamic sauce, served with seasonal greens and roasted garlic sweet potatoes to roasted quail stuffed with truffled polenta over sautéed spinach. Lamb shanks are 18oz. of slowly braised tender lamb, served over a cannellini bean ragu. Grilled duck sausage is served with roasted Italian peppers over velvety polenta. Fish lovers have a choice of grilled center cut tuna served with mustard seed potato puree and a Livornese sauce or Branzino, Mediterranean sea bass pan roasted and served with wilted greens and sunchoke purée. The devoted carnivore has an embarrassment of riches to choose from, with an 18oz. bone in rib steak with Gorgonzola potatoes and Barolo wine sauce or 10oz. beef tenderloin with crispy pancetta, root vegetables and potato puree. All beef is dry aged for 90 days for maximum flavor and tenderness.

Desserts are different every day, impressive and imaginative. Wine poached pears in a pool of silky *crème Anglaise*, roasted apple in a spun sugar embrace or any of the house-made gelatos or sorbets would be a marvelous end to the meal. An assortment of imported and domestic cheeses invite the diner to finish off the homemade breadsticks and crackers. Chocolate soup, served in an edible chocolate bowl with floating islands of whipped cream will knock the socks off any chocoholic.

Ristorante da Vinci has a gorgeous bar and bartenders with real chops. The martini list is full of tempting drinks like the pear martini, made with Grey Goose La Poire vodka, elderflower liqueur and a splash of cranberry. The Ictini is made with Sobieski Russian vodka and Frogmore Creek Iced Riesling and garnished with frozen grapes. Sparkling cocktails give new punch to brunch, with Bellini made from fresh peach puree and Prosecco or Rossini with strawberry purée. The connoisseur of tequila or single malt Scotch will be well pleased, as well as the devotee of single barrel bourbon or sipping rums. The wine selection is educated and thoughtful, and da Vinci has special wine tasting events frequently. For the truly adventuresome, a select few can indulge the adrenaline with wine tasting followed by helicopter rides around the area.

Chef Joseph Gotti said "We put heart and soul into everything we do at da Vinci". Leonardo himself could not have expressed it better.

Ristorante da Vinci 2801 E.Spring Street Long Beach 562) 685-8111 **RL**

Restaurant Review