

Riso. From Verona to the East Village

sandy amato (March 05, 2014)



From the city of Romeo and Juliet comes a traditional “risotteria” run by a family that has been in the rice business for ages. The Melottis have a history of cultivating and processing rice according to traditional procedures. They only use their own product, which you can also buy at their Risotteria.

Gianmaria Melotti’s Risotteria Melotti opened its door in New York City last summer, and it didn’t take long to get on people’s radar. Their secret? Simple, traditional, 100% gluten free cooking with a menu dedicated exclusively to rice dishes, including a wide selection of traditional “risotti” recipes from Isola della Scala, a most renowned center for rice cultivation in the Veneto region, located just outside Verona, the birthplace of Romeo and Juliet.

Risotteria also carries a wide selection of wines from the same region. “This was the dream of the Melotti family, especially of Gianmaria Melotti, who came to New York in 2007 and fell in love with the city,” says executive chef Maristella Innocenti. Innocenti is in charge of the day- to-day operations at Risotteria Melotti NY alongside 23-year-old general manager Alberto Pomello and



creative director Davide Mantovani.

The success of Risotteria Melotti largely stems from their fidelity to tradition and love of nature. And tradition and nature are important words for the Melotti family. Their decision to use exclusively their own rice and uphold high quality standards was a courageous one. And, it turns out, one that's winning the hearts of New Yorkers too. For hundreds of years, ever since the first rice paddy was cultivated in Verona, the manual processing method has remained the same. There are no chemical treatments involved. The rice arrives at your table as is— untreated and all natural.

Davide Mantovani has decorated the 30-seat restaurant with furniture and objects from Italy that call to mind the fertile Veneto plains fed by the Adige River. Entering the restaurant, you find yourself transported to a strikingly rural place, filled with wooden wheels, plows, old bowls, and other rice containers, as well as a lot of pictures about cultivating rice. The placemat tells the story of the Melotti family and the menu is exactly the same as the one in Isola della Scala.

Near the entrance there is a little corner shop where you can buy Melotti rice and other specialty products, such as riso semilavorato (partially milled rice), Carnaroli rice, riso essiccato sull'aia (naturally dried rice) and much more. With Innocenti as Executive Chef, you can rest assured the menu will make you feel as if you were sitting in a trattoria overlooking the Po river. Indeed, you'll discover more Italian rice dishes than you'd imagined existed.

For those allergic to gluten, no worries—the menu is 100% gluten-free. “Apparently we are the only restaurant in New York that is 100% gluten free,” says Innocenti, who came up with the idea. “Our specialty is risotto, of course. We have 15 or 16 types on the menu, but you can eat everything you want here, from entrees like polenta with mushrooms and gorgonzola to fried polenta to tiramisù. It's all gluten-free. We don't serve bread. Instead we make focaccia using rice flour or we toast rice cakes with olive oil and rosemary, and, I have to say, people love it. They are addictive!” Trust us. She did a fantastic job in creating new dishes made exclusively with rice.

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