

SD26 Anniversary. A Celebration with a Purpose

I. I. (February 05, 2015)



SD26 is an important NYC's destination for authentic Italian cuisine. Located at Madison Square Park on 19 East 26th Street, SD26 just celebrated its 5th anniversary on January 20 with a gala complete with delicious food and Italian jazz music; the proceeds benefiting the "Tony May Scholarship for Italian Culinary Studies". Francine Segan speaks with the father-daughter owners, Tony and Marisa May, and their executive chef, Matteo Bergamini, about the success of their restaurant.

After his two previous successful restaurant ventures, Palio and San Domenico, Tony May, one of America's most respected restaurateurs, in 2009 opened SD26 with his daughter Marisa May.

SD26 offers those seeking to taste an authentic piece of Italy a contemporary Italian menu, including Spaghetti alla Chitarra, Caponata or Braised Beef Cheeks "Alla Vaccinara". Aside from his accomplishments in the Italian culinary world, May is known for philanthropic efforts through his Tony May's Scholarship for Italian Culinary Studies and for his achievements in educating younger



generations in creating authentic Italian cuisine. i-Italy TV is here at SD26 for a fabulous fifth anniversary gala. A gala raising funds for the special Tony May scholarship. Francine Segan speaks with the father-daughter owners, Tony and Marisa May, and their executive chef, Matteo Bergamini, So wonderful to be here with you tonight. Tony, Tell me a little bit about the story of SD26.

TONY MAY - Well, this is a very long story, of course. It started many years ago when we initiated the Italian cuisine campaign. We started in the 70s and the early 80s, then came Palio followed by San Domenico and then, in 2009, we opened here. We have been here for five years now.

This is such a gorgeous spot, the architecture is so beautiful, who did it?

TONY MAY - This was conceived by Massimo Vignelli who has unfortunately passed away; we miss him a lot, but he did a fantastic job. His lines are so distinguished, so clear: the cleaner they are the more powerful they become.

Marisa, how have the five years been down here?

MARISA MAY - It's been a very exciting five years in a neighborhood called Madison Square Park that is totally evolving: it's becoming a mecca for great restaurants and here we represent a piece of Italy in New York. And it is also a neighborhood very food and wine savvy; they really appreciate what my dad and I are doing. And our executive chef Matteo, who is 34, is doing an incredible job. They truly understand what we're doing here and we've been very blessed to have five years: we look forward to many more years to come and to continue feeding New York authentic Italian cuisine.

Tell me a little about this wonderful scholarship.

MARISA MAY - Well, I'm so proud of my father, Tony May, who has done so much for Italian cuisine in America for many, many years. He has worked so hard to improve the image of Italian food and wine in America. But he has done a lot also with education throughout the years, by sending young chefs from America to Italy to learn about authentic Italian cuisine, and by having American chefs learning about it in our kitchen. This scholarship is named Tony May's Scholarship for Italian Culinary Studies and it's given by the James Beard Foundation. We are probably going to use the Italian culinary institute for foreigners in Costigliole d'Asti to send students for a minimum of three months, or for other major scholarship of six months.

There aren't many women in restaurants. How are you feeling in this very male-dominated role?

MARISA MAY - It is challenging but at the same time very exciting: it's unique because so few restaurateurs have their daughters with them, usually they work with their sons. So, my dad and I, as a father-daughter team, are very unique and we add something to it that people might not get in other restaurants. Often people don't even know who the owners are in restaurants anymore, while we are still a family, a father-daughter team, still working together everyday.

You're so right. You get that feeling that it is a family.

MARISA MAY - Yes it is, even though I'm Italian-American. I was born and raised in New York City, but I spent my summers in Italy, my grandmother still lives there and my father has taken me to Italy every summer since the day I was born so I could learn about Italian hospitality. Here we bring the best Italian quality. We try to combine all the authentic flavors from Italy: Naples, the North, but we like to do also different recipes from Sicily, Puglia and the rest of Italy.

Chef Matteo, what delicious food tonight. Tell us about some of the dishes you prepared.

MATTEO BERGAMINI - Tonight we have organized different food stations. We have a pork station with the porchetta and cassoeula, a peculiar dish from Lombardia. Then we have a pasta station with Genovese sauce, Spaghetti alla Chitarra with tomatoes, and a seafood ragu. All different kinds of food, from all over Italy.



Wonderful atmosphere, great wine, what a great party at Sd26 Restaurant.

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