

Donato Enoteca: The Art of Italian Hospitality

By Emily Mangini

Donato Scotti, chef and owner of Donato Enoteca (1041 Middlefield) has had an illustrious career, though it may have seemed unlikely considering his upbringing in northern Italy. Before the prestigious culinary school, before the Michelin-star restaurants, and before becoming Redwood City's mononymous celebrity chef, he was just a boy begging his mother not to send him back to summer camp.

"She had sent me to a camp by the sea. I came home and begged her to let me get a job instead," Donato says. So, at the age of 12, a piccolo Donato filled his mornings delivering fresh bread by bicycle. The job was perfect for a young boy with a big appetite. "I was supposed to arrive at the bakery at 6 a.m., but I would arrive at 3 a.m. so I could watch the bakers work. And eat," he adds with a rumbling laugh. To this day, one of Donato's favorite foods to make is bread.

While his childhood labor delivering fresh bread on cobblestone streets easily could have been a scene in a Benigni film, Donato made the decision to join the culinary world in a slightly more pedestrian way: Career Day in high school.

"The hospitality guy was talking. I thought, 'Hey, I like food. I like people. That sounds great,'" Donato says. After high school Donato excelled at the culinary school Istituto Alberghiero di San Pellegrino. Having mastered the art of modern Italian cuisine and absorbed the cultural tradition of hospitality, Donato headed to the United States, his goal to broaden the American scope of Italian food. After working in New York City and Los Angeles, he settled



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in the Bay Area. At each step honing and perfecting his craft, he blended a rustic Italian cuisine with modern techniques and local ingredients.

Consequently, Donato Enoteca succeeds at offering Redwood City a taste of Italian culture beyond spaghetti and meatballs.

"When I first opened, I had someone come in and ask for fettucine alfredo. It's not bad, it's just not what I'm trying to do here," explains Donato.

Instead, dishes like Spaghetti al Nero — pasta that has been blackened with squid ink — or the Sottocoste e Polenta — short ribs slow-braised in a Sangiovese wine and served with a creamy polenta — grace the

menu. With dishes like these, there's no room for fettucine alfredo.

"As more and more people travel to Italy, the more I find them saying that our restaurant is the only place they can find the food they fell in love with in Italy," Donato says.

Pizza Tonno e Cipole, is a perfect example. Tuna is a tried-and-true pizza topping in Italy, but it's practically unheard of in the States. Donato has succeeded in gently steering us from the expected pepperoni and introducing a level of Italian authenticity in a way that feels new and intriguing.

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Donato also engages his guests through special culinary events throughout the year. Whether it's Father's Day or the arrival of the bianca tartufo (white truffle) in November, Donato is ready to celebrate with an impeccably curated menu.

The biggest event of the year, Enoteca 100 on the first Saturday of December, is not to be missed. With the wood-burning oven aflame, guests feast on decadent small plates while tasting 100 of Italy's finest wines. These events and special menus offer the unique chance to explore Italian cuisine and culture.

"I want people to feel welcomed, to come for a wine party, a happy hour, or a family dinner," Donato says, gesturing broadly to his restaurant. It's this sense of hospitality, coupled with Donato's culinary creativity, which keeps Redwood City and the Bay Area coming back for more. **C**