

morini

DOWN TO THE DETAILS: THE FINE POINTS OF SERVICE
CULINARY SOULMATE: MEET BILL DORRLER
FLAVORFUL DESIGN: AN AUTHENTIC OSTERIA
IN HIGH SPIRITS: SIPPING THE BIANCO
RECIPES: THE BREADBASKET OF ITALY DELIVERS



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If you dropped Osteria da Morini smack-dab into the middle of Bologna, it would be right at home.

Even vacationing Italians are asking for the sauces to be bottled up, because they taste the authentic flavors of their childhood in the cooking. And the locals in SoHo are embracing this slice of Italy on their doorstep in the same way Italians do of their local trattorias, returning time and time again for more of Emilia-Romagna's comfort cuisine.

5 **Found in Translation**
From the décor to the dishes, Morini exudes the authenticity of Emilia-Romagna.

7 **Down to the Details**
Carolyn DeFir curates the ultimate dinner party night after night at Morini.

9 **Culinary Soulmate**
Michael White's alter ego Bill Dorler interprets the cuisine of Emilia-Romagna to a T.

10 **On the Stove**
The breadbasket of Italy is a constant source of inspiration for Morini's recipes.

13 **The Flavor of Design**
A longtime friend from Imola captures the true spirit of Emilia-Romagna in the décor.

15 **In High Spirits**
Straightforward but unique cocktails reflect the simplicity of the cuisine at Morini.

ALTAMAREA GROUP: OUR RESTAURANT LOCATIONS

 <p>Osteria Morini 218 Lafayette Street New York, NY 10012 t. 212.965.8777</p>	 <p>Marea 240 Central Park South New York, NY 10019 t. 212.582.5100</p>	 <p>Ai Fiori 400 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10018 t. 212.613.8660</p>	 <p>Due Terre 107 Morristown Road Bernardsville, NJ 07924 t. 908.221.0040</p>	 <p>Due Mari 78 Albany Street New Brunswick, NJ 08901 t. 732.296.1600</p>	 <p>Al Molo Shop G63, G/F Harbour City, Hong Kong t. +852 2525 9300</p>
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CAPOSALDO PROSECCO.



BUBBLY,
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You never forget your first love, and for Chef Michael White, it was his initial encounter with what he recognized as truly Italian food when he first landed in Emilia-Romagna in 1993. Meaty Bolognese sauces, shiny tortellini in thick broth, tagliatelle with ragu, slices of locally cured prosciutto and mortadella, chunks of Parmesan—these are the hallmarks of Bologna, affectionately referred to as the breadbasket of Italy. And so after years of keeping it all on the back burner at his other successful restaurants, White finally decided to showcase the region’s soulful food at Osteria da Morini, which opened last October.

Michael White had always wanted to get back downtown since his Fiamma days. And since the cooking called for a more casual setting, it was well suited to SoHo. “The great part about being in New York City is that you can have a specific food focus on one region, and because we have this great audience that travels to places like Florence and Bologna, they are open-minded and knowledgeable. This is the kind of cuisine everyone can like—this is Romagna’s comfort food, and therefore very approachable for the American palate. The whole concept hits a sweet spot for a cross-section of people; whether it’s their go-to place to grab a salad and some sliced meats or a place to have a full-blown meal, you can use it to your liking.”

Chef White’s first venture into more rustic fare is without compromise, thanks in no small part to the eight years of living and training in the area that gave White invaluable insight into a culinary education, and a cultural one as well. As a result, not only is the food authentic, but so is the restaurant itself.

A true Italian trattoria or *osteria* is an honest representation of the owner or host, often taking years to develop—a place where people can come two to three times a week to dine on genuine, hearty cuisine at reasonable prices. Stepping into Morini is like stepping into authenticity, from the decor and materials down to the china pattern. “We junked out a 1700s farmhouse, taking it apart brick by brick, and shipping it all over here,” White explains, pointing out the original beams

with wood sockets, the resized barn doors, and the tile work. “This is a direct representation of what a Romagna trattoria is supposed to look like. All these cupboards came from my sister-in-law’s great-grandfather’s house; my wife and my daughter and I scoured the summer markets for old prints and antiques. Look at the blackboard, the wooden tables, the rickety chairs, the stained banquettes. I didn’t want a Restoration Hardware look, I wanted a place where you could close your eyes and completely forget where you were for the entire dining experience.”

The trattoria is named after his mentor, Chef Gianluigi Morini, founder of San Domenico in Imola and with whom White worked in Emilia-Romagna. “It was an easy choice. Traditionally trattorias are named after a person, usually the owner. Mr. Morini showed me where all the good *osterias* and trattorias were in the region. Not only is he considered one of the forefathers of fine Italian dining, but he’s also a true Italian gentleman.”

There is nothing dainty about Bolognese cooking, a fact White is happy to wrap both hands around, especially in the kitchen. “Bolognese cuisine is commonly referred to as *la grassa* or ‘the fat one,’ because it is real food,” he explains. “Italy is a raw-materials driven country the same way that if you lived in Campania you’d eat a seafood-driven diet. With 20 ingredients or fewer, you can do all Bolognese cooking: Parmigiana, prosciutto and prosciutto cotto, mortadella, eggs and flour to make the pasta, etc.” It’s hearty, soulful food, and

not to be taken lightly! If anything, a traditionally American approach to the menu would dilute its core. “A lot of times, Italian restaurants in the states have been sanitized a bit for our culture, something I did not do here,” he adds.

His suggestion: don’t work your way through the entire menu in one meal. “Use your waiters to guide you through. This is the kind of place where you might want to have an antipasti and gnocchi one day, and then a presta porchetta sandwich and a fennel salad the next.” His favorite compliments on the food are from Italians who are vacationing or working in the city. “People are almost moved. It’s a combination of setting and flavors—closing your eyes and tasting your mother’s cooking. When I get those kinds of comments, it is inspirational, and I know my team has done the right job.”





DOWN TO THE DETAILS

CAROLYN DEFIR, GENERAL MANAGER AT MORINI

Not long ago, Champagne flutes were removed from the Morini service. It was a decision that I did not take lightly.

Our red and white wineglasses are stemless. It seemed like we had a little disconnect by bringing a perceived serious dining history into a more playful setting. After all, we serve lambrusco in a nonserious wineglass, so why not serve the sparkling whites the same way and give guests a chance to loosen their collars and take the pretense out of the experience.

It might seem like a small detail in the scheme of things, but it can start a ripple effect that could turn into what I call a never-ending idea factory. Ultimately it's not about the wineglass so much as it is about perception: people have certain expectations, especially if they have experienced Michael White's cooking in a different location with a different type of service. Unlike his other restaurants, we have a more rustic, casual approach to dining going on here. It was the reason we decided to go with place mats and paper napkins, which really took people aback when we first opened, enough so that we paused and thought about whether we needed linens instead. But it's not that simple. Would the linens mess up the color scheme? If we took away the paper napkins, we would have to take away the place mats, so now instead of a burst of color on each table it would be showing more brown. Does that mean we need oyster forks on the days we serve them? And so on. But we kept the paper napkins. We want to encourage that feeling of walking down a cobblestone street in Italy, going into a tiny alleyway, and coming upon this great spot with good food and attentive service, where food is the centerpiece.

Morini has offered me a unique experience by being part of the entire process from the beginning of the renovations. Most of the time, a manager is brought in for the opening to build up the service, deal with staffing and wine lists, and so forth. I started coming by every day at the site and started hanging out with the plumbers and the framers, following literally every detail of the restaurant from the ground up. My heart is really in this place.

Having known Michael as long as I have, and having been a part of Morini's birth, it comes naturally to support Michael's vision. Working with Michael really is an honor because he is a true artist. Even the energy around him is infectious—you can see it when he is talking to diners at their table, and they are getting excited just listening to him.

Authenticity of food matched with great service is our goal. We are continually talking about the region at service meetings, with purveyors and winemakers, with our architect, and so on. But it is when I talk

to the people who live there, who look around the restaurant and tell me it looks just like their home, that I know the food and setting is as it should be.

Sometimes I feel like a curator or the hostess of a really great dinner party. Nothing beats that feeling when everything is going right: it's a great night, you are in the right spot at the right time, your guests have wineglasses in their hands, they are eating and engaging in great conversation, and everybody is involved—from the servers to the host stand. You are almost convinced everyone is everyone else's friend as the conversations get louder. There is a fantastic symbiotic relationship between the staff, who are helping guests to have this type of experience. The flow can be so seamless that I think guests forget they are actually in a restaurant—they have everything at the table they need. They might just be in Emilia-Romagna!

When I train new managers, I like to give them this tip: when you're in the middle of service, take a minute and step outside. I know leaving the floor might seem like something you should never do, but take a breath, come back in, and take a

look around with a new perspective: what do the lights look like, the sounds, the conversation? How does the music flow; how does the food smell? Personally, if I walk into an Italian restaurant and can't smell that I'm going to have a good time, then something is wrong. Look at people's faces—if someone's not eating their food or

they look angry or sad, is it because they aren't enjoying their company, or their meal? You have to be all people and all things at that point, and not just to the guests who are having an experience here. You also have to be all things to your staff, because it

takes everyone to make that happen.

More than at any other place I have ever worked, I have people coming up to me at the end of their evening to shake my hand or stop to ask me a question about the food. Our guests really have a good time—they trust their servers and bartenders, and they leave singing songs! I don't know what they are thinking before they get here, but once they arrive they start talking about how cute it is, looking at the china and asking where they can get some. (Michael had it custom-made in Florence with a local wildflower on it.) Guests really come away thinking the food looks and tastes authentic and that their service was great. Sometimes, they high-five each other and make reservations to come back before they even leave. People have very specific ideas about what *their* Italian food is, based on family and tradition, and yet at this restaurant I have had so many people say (or whisper) that the meatballs are better than their grandmother's. And, sure, they feel so guilty by saying that—but it's charming and the best compliment we could ever get!

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CULINARY SOULMATE

BILL DORRLER, CHEF DE CUISINE AT MORINI

“Over the past five years, Bill and I have developed both a working and a culinary bond that has been shaped by method and technique—the recipes just flow naturally between us. If I ask him to do veal with cream sauce, he will get as close to it as if I had done it myself—because that’s what happens when you work with someone for that long. Since Bill and I did not grow up in Italy, we don’t take the food or the flavors for granted. But he has a true passion for Italian food, a great palate, and such a desire to cook very well, which is really at the heart of any great chef.” —Michael White

I grew up around food. My backyard was a 200-acre dairy farm in New Jersey, where I used to pick strawberries, tomatoes, and corn, and even milk cows. Ever since I was a kid, I’ve been excited about the restaurant business. We were a family of seven, so we didn’t eat out that often—but when we did, the whole concept of getting a menu and someone coming over to take your order was thrilling to me. Fifteen years later, I still love everything about the industry—not just the fun, glamorous parts, but the day in, day out of it all. I have always held on to that concept of how special it was for me growing up. So being in the kitchen today, providing food for our guests, is still my daily high!

I actually graduated with an accounting degree, but I never really felt I fit in the world of finance. All through college, I

cooked for my roommates. My favorite pastime was going to a store, shopping, and then preparing a big meal for all of our friends. I crossed over into the restaurant business not really knowing what to expect, but I never turned back.

I had the good fortune of starting to work with Michael White about five years ago as his chef de cuisine at Due Terre and Due Mari in New Jersey. Up to that point, I had worked and loved more than anything mostly Italian cuisine, but never with such intense focus. I started to try to think like him—really listen to him—and I also read

and study a lot about the food. Michael’s breadth of knowledge is overwhelming. Coming to New York City to open Morini seemed like such a natural transition for me. It’s not an easy job, but it is my passion; we all put in a lot of hours, but this is truly where I belong. I really believe that I am just where I am supposed to be, and that in itself gives me inner drive and energy.

At Morini, Michael did an incredible job of bringing his experience of living in Emilia-Romagna to life. I get daily compliments from native Italians who speak little English, who tell me they feel as if they never even left home. Morini should

“I have worked with a lot of chefs de cuisine who are concerned only about the kitchen and details, but Bill comes out and talks to the staff about the food in a way I have never experienced before. He is a coach in every sense of the word. We are making simple, soulful food here. You have to know what you are talking about to get people excited about it—and he does. He is really animated and also very passionate about the restaurant working well and everyone working well together.”

—Caroline DeFir, General Manager

be enjoyed the way it would be enjoyed in Europe. You need to step off Lafayette Street and leave everything else behind, just relax, otherwise you’ll miss the point of the experience. Look around you: at the walls, the floors,

the decor. The idea at Morini is to open yourself up to the moment, enjoy the food, and share it family style. You might want to start with the *battilardo* plate of sliced meats fresh from the region and the *polpettine* meatballs for the table. Think communal, friends, enjoying, laughing, having a glass of wine. Then have some fresh greens or a pasta plate. Even if you are at a table for two, order two pastas and share them! Our grilled meats and fishes are not meant to be complete dinners, with starches and potatoes, but simple—on the grill with a bit of fresh rosemary, a bit of braised fennel, or a little



spinach and butter—the way you would enjoy it in Emilia-Romagna. We prepare this pork chop that is a beautiful end-cut chop on the bone, with great marbling and meat-to-fat ratio so it self-bastes as it cooks. We make our own pesto lardo that we use in sandwiches. And, of course, pasta is king in Emilia-Romagna. We make all our pasta in-house using an extruder, so we can make all kinds of spirals and different, authentic shapes.

Another way we really encourage the Emilia-Romagna camaraderie and communal way of living is how we connect our staff. We always try to close any barriers that might come up between the front and back of the house so the diner gets a full team effort. Overall, we have a young team—with a collection of many levels of experience—which right off the bat can be a challenge. But everyone is determined, everyone is learning, feeling the passion, and everyone is excited to create this special experience for our guests.





LASAGNE ALLA BOLOGNESE

Makes 8 main-course servings and 7 cups sauce

MEAT AND TOMATO SAUCE

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
 1 small yellow onion, diced (1/2 cup)
 1 small carrot, peeled and diced (1/4 cup)
 1 small rib celery, trimmed and diced (1/4 cup)
 1/4 cup tomato paste
 Two 28-oz cans whole peeled tomatoes, undrained
 Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1/2 lb ground beef
 1/2 lb ground pork
 1/2 lb ground veal
 1 sprig fresh rosemary
 1 sprig fresh sage
 2 bay leaves
 Parmigiano-Reggiano rind, 2 to 4 inches (optional)

To make the Meat and Tomato Sauce:

In a large soup pot or Dutch oven, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook, stirring constantly for 1 minute. Add the tomatoes one at a time, crushing them by hand as you go. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pot and simmer over low heat.

Meanwhile, heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the beef, pork, and veal, season with salt and pepper, and cook until the meat is no longer pink, about 7 minutes, breaking up the pieces with a wooden spoon. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the meat to the sauce. Add the rosemary, sage, and bay leaves along with the rind of the Parmigiano, cover, and simmer the sauce over low heat for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Remove the bay leaves and cheese rind and taste to adjust the salt and pepper.

BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

7 tbsp unsalted butter, plus more to grease the pan
 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
 6 cups whole milk
 Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
 Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1 1/2 lbs store-bought sheets of fresh pasta
 2 cups freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

To make the Béchamel Sauce:

In a large saucepan, melt 6 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until it starts to turn pale yellow, about 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the sauce is thickened, about 30 minutes, whisking occasionally. Strain the sauce into a bowl and season to taste with nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Lay a piece of plastic wrap on the surface and set aside until ready to assemble the lasagna.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F and butter an ovenproof 9 by 13-inch rectangular casserole dish.

Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil, add the pasta in batches, and boil until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water. Spread the pasta out in layers between kitchen towels. Set aside.

Spoon 1 1/2 cups of the meat sauce evenly over the bottom of the prepared casserole dish. Spread 1 cup of white sauce on top and sprinkle with 3 tablespoons of the grated cheese. Cover with a layer of pasta. Repeat to make 5 more layers, ending with the remaining meat sauce, white sauce, and cheese.

Dot the remaining tablespoon of butter on top of the lasagna and bake until bubbly and hot, 45 to 50 minutes. Remove the lasagna from the oven and set aside for 10 minutes to firm up before cutting into squares and serving.

MORTADELLA AND PROSCIUTTO POLPETTINE

Serves 4 to 6

INGREDIENTS

3 slices white bread, crusts removed
 1 cup milk
 2 oz mortadella (about 1/2-inch-thick slice), chopped
 2 oz prosciutto (about 1/4-inch-thick slice), chopped
 1 lb ground pork
 3 oz Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated (about 1 cup)
 2 large eggs, beaten
 1/8 tsp freshly grated nutmeg
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper
 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
 6 cups homemade or store-bought marinara sauce

METHOD

In a small bowl, combine the bread and milk and let stand for 10 minutes. Drain and discard any milk that hasn't been absorbed by the bread. Tear the bread into 1/4-inch pieces. Reserve.

In a food processor, combine the mortadella and prosciutto and pulse until the meat is coarsely ground—about 8 one-second pulses.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the mortadella and prosciutto with the ground pork, cheese, eggs, and bread. Add the nutmeg and season the mixture well with salt and pepper. Mix gently by hand until

just combined. Let the mixture rest in the refrigerator for 1 hour before forming the meat into about 14 golf-ball-size meatballs.

In a large nonstick skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high. Add the meatballs and cook, turning occasionally, until browned on all sides, about 10 minutes. Cover the meatballs with the marinara sauce, bring to a simmer over medium-low heat, and cook partially covered until the meatballs are cooked through, about 20 minutes longer. Serve immediately.



GARGANELLI CON CREMA DI PARMIGIANO, PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA, E RADICCHIO

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups grated Parmigiano, plus extra for grating at the end
 1 1/2 cups boiling chicken stock
 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
 2 tbsp white truffle oil (optional)
 4 tbsp (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
 1/4 cup yellow onion, finely diced
 2 cloves garlic, sliced
 2 cups radicchio leaves, julienned
 6 oz prosciutto di Parma, thinly sliced
 1 tsp fresh thyme leaves
 sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1 lb garganelli pasta

METHOD

Put all but 2 tablespoons of the grated cheese in a large, deep heat-resistant bowl. Pour 1/2 cup of boiling chicken stock over the cheese and, using an immersion blender, blend on high speed until the cheese begins to melt (or transfer the mixture to the jar of an electric blender and blend on high speed). With the blender running, add the olive oil and truffle oil (if using) and continue blending until the sauce is smooth and emulsified. When blended, pour the sauce into a small pan, cover, and keep warm over very low heat.

In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring until the onion is translucent, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the radicchio, prosciutto, remaining 1 cup of boiling chicken stock, and thyme. Return to a boil then adjust

the heat down to medium-low and simmer until heated through, 2 to 3 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Keep warm.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Stir in the pasta and cook until al dente, about 2 minutes for fresh pasta, then drain. For dried pasta, follow the manufacturer's directions.

While the pasta is boiling, remove the sauce from the heat. Stir in the reserved 2 tablespoons of grated cheese. Add the pasta to the sauce and turn to coat evenly. Divide the pasta among 4 large plates.

Sprinkle with additional cheese and ground black pepper, drizzle a little olive oil over the pasta, and serve at once.





Gianluigi Morini, Michael White, and Franco Rosignolo at the opening of Osteria Morini.

THE FLAVOR OF DESIGN WITH FRANCO ROSIGNOLO

From floor to ceiling, architect Franco Rosignolo captured the true spirit and of an authentic osteria in Emilia-Romagna.

As a longtime resident of Emilia-Romagna, in your mind what are the most important feelings of a true *osteria*? An *osteria* is a simple, unassuming place where you can eat traditional and flavorful food. It is a place that you enjoy with friends and share good food and memories.

Where did you find the special woods, floors, and artifacts for Osteria Morini? Most of the wood ceiling and artifacts were found in Romagna markets and stores specializing in remodeling and restoring old buildings. There are six key markets in the Imola vicinity that have special antiques on weekends. We sourced many of the artifacts from there. The woods and floors came from old rustic farmhouses. We took every care to make the inside feel exactly as if you were in Emilia-Romagna.

How long have you known Gianluigi Morini? I met Mr. Morini in 1980, when I had my wedding party at San Domenico in Imola. A few years later he asked me to become the architect of his restaurant. While I trained to be an architect in Florence, my roots are from Imola, and San Domenico introduced fine dining to this part of Italy. Over the years, as I got to know Mr. Morini better, we developed a deep and lasting friendship. And when Chef Michael White trained in San Domenico, Mr. Morini early on noticed his unique talents and true love for Italian food.

What does Mr. Morini think of Chef White's *osteria* in New York City? Does he find it authentic? Mr. Morini was excited and honored to have Osteria Morini named after him. It reflects the mutual respect between Chef Michael White and Mr. Morini over the years, and his support of Michael. He visited New York at the opening for a month and was extremely pleased with the full level of authenticity of the final product and how true it was to an Emilia-Romagna Italian *osteria*. Many Italian guests who come to Osteria Morini remark how much this feels like home, and the food reminds them of their youth or their travels in Italy.

What was the most challenging part for you to design this osteria in New York? What feeling did you want to have, and did you succeed? The most challenging part was to combine all of the different elements and characters to recreate an authentic feeling and style of a true *osteria*. It was important to bring all the essential pieces together in full harmony and not overplay the theme. I believe we have succeeded in doing that with Morini.

What makes the Emilia-Romagna area special, and what would you like New Yorkers to understand about it? Emilia-Romagna's uniqueness comes from the people who are hard workers, design- and creativity- oriented, as well

as wonderful food and lovers of the "good life." Emilia-Romagna is also known as the birthplace of Ferrari, Maserati, and Lamborghini, which are perfect examples of the high technology

and design. Bologna is known as *La Grassa* — the Fat — for the good food; *La Turrita* — the Towers — because in the 15th century, there were 100 towers in the city; and *La Dotta* — the Cultured — for its famous university, one of the oldest in the world. Bologna is also well known as the birth place of Pellegrino Artusi, an author considered the father of modern Italian cooking. I would like New Yorkers to visit Osteria Morini and enjoy the same experience they would have while visiting Emilia-Romagna.

In your view, what dishes on the menu really represent the Emilia-Romagna *osteria*? Bologna, considered by many to be the food capital of Italy, is the main city in Emilia-Romagna and in the whole region. The food at Morini is based on traditional cooking, and the most represented dishes on the menu are certainly all of the pastas, the salumi, and the pork dishes. My personal favorites are

garganelli, handmade pasta quills from Imola, my hometown, and tortellini, one of the famous filled Italian pastas from the 15th century. Prosciutto and salami from Parma and mortadella from Bologna are all typical of Emilia-Romagna.

You also designed the highly acclaimed Marea. What was the most important feeling or design that you wanted to accomplish there? The most critical challenge with regard to Marea was creating a contemporary and elegant restaurant that matched the vision for Chef Michael White's cooking in the coastal areas. Marea is a seamless mix of design and food, all combined into one experience. It's a special restaurant and reminds

us at the Altamarea Group how important it is for the design and food vision to be in symmetry.

Although they are very different, what similarities exist between Marea and Morini? Although

different, one represents contemporary Italian design and the other more traditional; both have a commitment to authenticity to their respective regions and a commitment to the highest-quality cuisine.

How involved is Chef Michael White and the AMG team in the design? Very involved. For instance, Chef White and Ahmass Fakahany [Altamarea Group's chief executive] personally made several trips to Bologna and Imola last year to visit antique shops and handpick items for the restaurant. They visited balsamic vinegar makers to see the product being made that they would use in the kitchen, and they ate at several *osterias* in the region and met many local chefs. By tasting and closely understanding the menu of the area, they captured the vision on how to transform it from Italy to New York. They brought their personal experiences back to build it here at Osteria Morini.

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BEHIND THE BAR

ROMAGNA STYLE

Head Bartender Richard Ervin keeps patrons happy with straightforward but unique cocktails that reflect the simplicity of the cuisine at Morini.

I've been creating cocktails for 20 years. But because I have also cooked and done a lot of private chef events, coming from the food side translates well into the drinks we design—particularly when I am able to work with chefs and create drink menus that complement their cuisines. Since the food here is straightforward, I feel the drinks should be conceived in that same vein. If people are going to get the Emilia-Romagna treatment at Morini, then they should get it full circle.

Most people know where Emilia-Romagna is, but they don't necessarily know other aspects of its cuisine besides its world-famous Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, balsamic vinegar from Modena, and prosciutto di Parma.

Most Italian restaurants tend to pull from all parts of Italy for their menu, but what Michael White does exceptionally well is feature the specific ingredients that surround the food in one location. It's a cool way to go about it. There are so many regions in Italy, but why not fully enjoy each one on its own. Let's go down to Morini and visit Emilia-Romagna!

For me, food and drink are equally important, and they have to complement each other. At Morini, I work with very few ingredients—maybe three main ingredients and then a juice, or three main ingredients, a syrup, and a splash of something. All of these drinks are straightforward—all equal parts. The simplicity of the drinks aligns with the uncomplicated food. You are getting a piece of meat that's been marinated in olive oil, rosemary, and lemon. That's it—and the flavor of the meat comes through. You don't need to put it in a dress.

We currently make all of our own cocktail syrups in-house, and that's key in helping to create specific flavor profiles. Homemade—that's very Italian! We even make our own saba, which is quite an undertaking; it takes two flats of grapes to make

two quarts of saba. Saba is basically a reduction of a lot of grapes into a very small amount of liquid. We have to be one of a few restaurants, if not the only one, to make our own saba. But it is important because a traditional summertime concoction in Emilia-Romagna involves mixing a fresh ounce of saba, some mint, and some sparkling soda. Although there are minimal ingredients in play, they create incredible flavors on the palate.

All ingredients in our specific saba cocktail are about the region. We use the house-made saba;

BIANCO

Equal parts Junipero Gin, Gran Classico Bitter, and Cocchi Americano

lambrusco, which is an incredible regional grape; and an infused vodka that we also make in-house. For the vodka infusion, we take all of the leftover grape must from the saba process (which, incidentally, Italians typically use in distilling grappa) and infuse vodka with it so nothing goes to waste.

Our cocktail menu is divided into sections. In the summertime, Italians drink a lot of spritzers. They generally flavor sparkling soda water, so a spritzer section on the cocktail menu made good sense. I am also very excited about the negronis we feature. The negroni is the classic cocktail of Italy, basically a bitter, a vermouth, and a core liquor. Being able to take that core equation and experiment with its ingredients to create different versions is interesting. Since Michael White's nickname is Chef Bianco, I was obsessed with creating a white negroni, as a nod to him. We took a spirit called Gran Classico, pretty much a precursor to Campari without the classic red dye, and Cocchi Americano, to create a very light, refreshing version of a negroni.

The idea that people come in to check out your negroni list is akin to someone checking out your martini list—except that we're the only ones in the city that I know of with a negroni list!

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SABA

Hailing back to Roman times, saba is a syrup made from freshly squeezed grapes and is also known as must. The grapes are cooked very slowly in a large vessel until the liquid thickens and reduces to less than half. As the naturally present grape sugars cook, they develop into a rich concentrated syrup that can be used for sweetening just about anything—from game and grain dishes to creating summer cocktails when added to soda water. The sugars also prevent it from going bad. Saba can be stored for years in a cool, dry place, but it must be refrigerated and used within a year once the bottle has been opened.

Saba retains a slightly acidic flavor from the grapes, which pairs nicely with sweet foods. It can be poured over desserts as a dressing, such as for ice cream and fresh fruits, and is also used in the production of balsamic vinegar, which involves fermentation of the must.

THE SABA

Equal parts grape must-infused vodka, Saba, and Lambrusco



HAUTENOTES

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HAUTEEVENTS

MEETTM AT NATIRAR

a social epicurean experience

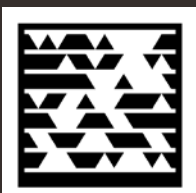
September 23–24, 2011

MEET at Natirar will commence Friday evening with **Table at the Farm**, an elegant and unique chef's dinner set within The Farm at Natirar. The menu will be created and executed by renowned chefs **Thomas Keller**, **Daniel Boulud**, and **Jerome Bocuse**, chef-owners extraordinaire, who continually push the envelope on distinction in culinary culture. The dinner will benefit the **Bocuse d'Or USA Foundation**, a not-for-profit organization devoted to inspiring culinary excellence in young professionals and preserving the traditions and quality of classic cuisine in America.

Saturday's event, **Epicurean Fields**, will feature several unforgettable culinary and wine experiences.



Photos courtesy of Bocuse d'Or USA and Natirar



Tickets on sale now at
meetatnatirar.com.

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HAUTELIFE
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