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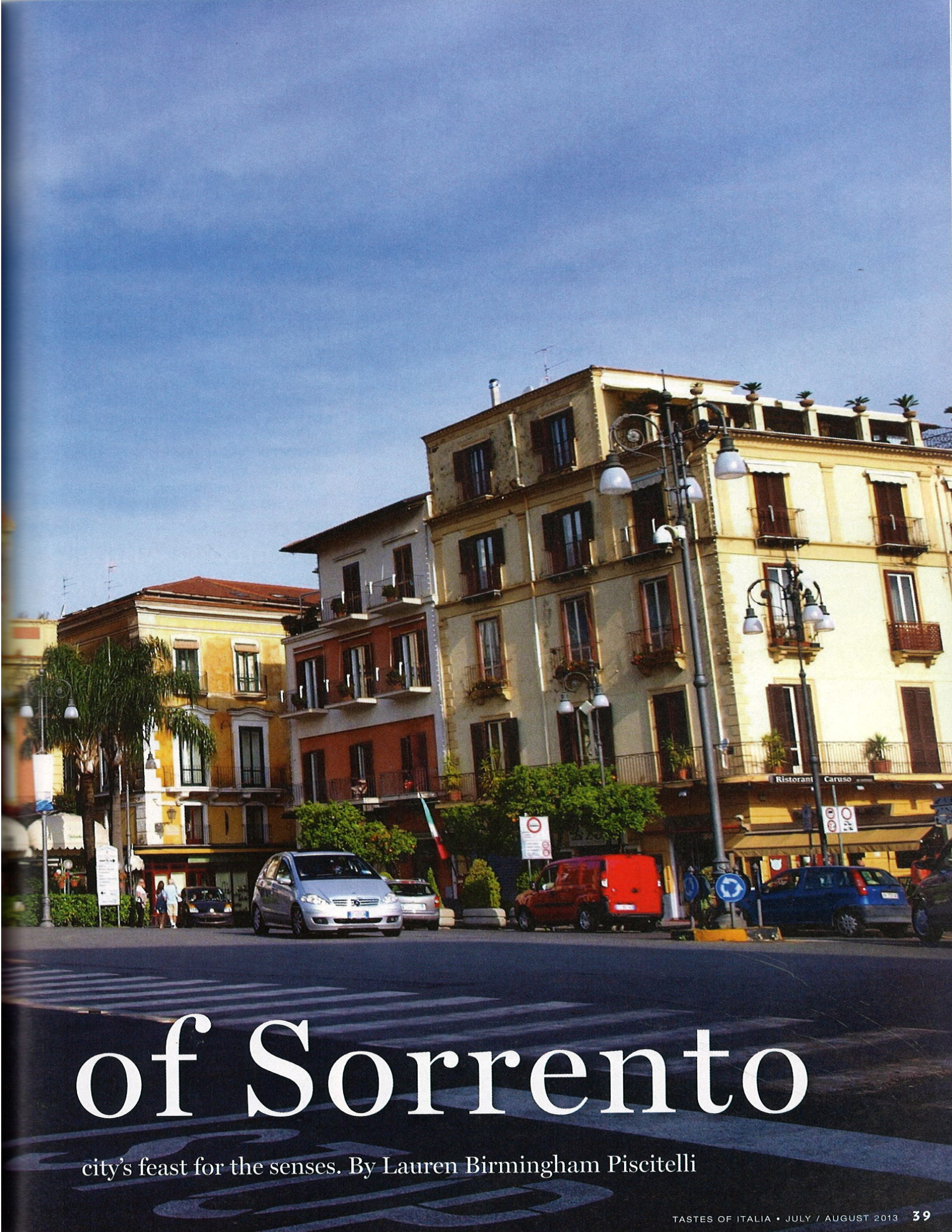
Native Intelligence



# The Magic

Visit a restaurant named for a Renaissance poet and savor this





# of Sorrento

city's feast for the senses. By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli



## Native Intelligence

**P**assione! In order to make anything run, you need to have passion. Passion is the base of success," says Angelo Celentano, the man behind the magic of Ristorante Tasso and Pizzeria in Sorrento.

Sorrento is the city of song, oranges and the tarantella – a festive, whirling dance. In Neapolitan dialect, Sorrento is spelled *Surriento*. Festive and bustling, it overlooks the Bay of Naples and attracts visitors from around the world for its food, music and culture.

Today I've taken my Vespa along the Strada 163, on the Amalfi Coast, just in time for pranzo (lunch) at Tasso. It is the crown jewel in the restaurant mecca of Campania.

In summer, fiori di zucca (squash flowers) are on the menu!

Fiori di zucca, piccole pizzette, and arancini arrive at my table. The teaser Neapolitan appetizer, a trio of delicately flash-fried squash flowers, small rounds of mini pizza and golden rice balls spiked with peas, is enough to inspire any food lover's appetite. Seasonal foods, prepared by executive hands, keep a mare nostrum theme on the menu. Brick oven pizza; handmade pasta with fish, eggplant, pumpkin or squash; fish any way you like it – grilled, sautéed, flash-fried or baked – prime cuts of filetto, pork, lamb and veal; and exquisite desserts like tiramisu and baba rum are just a sample of regional food on the menu.

Angelo explains that their kitchen is classic with new twists of interpretation, and cream

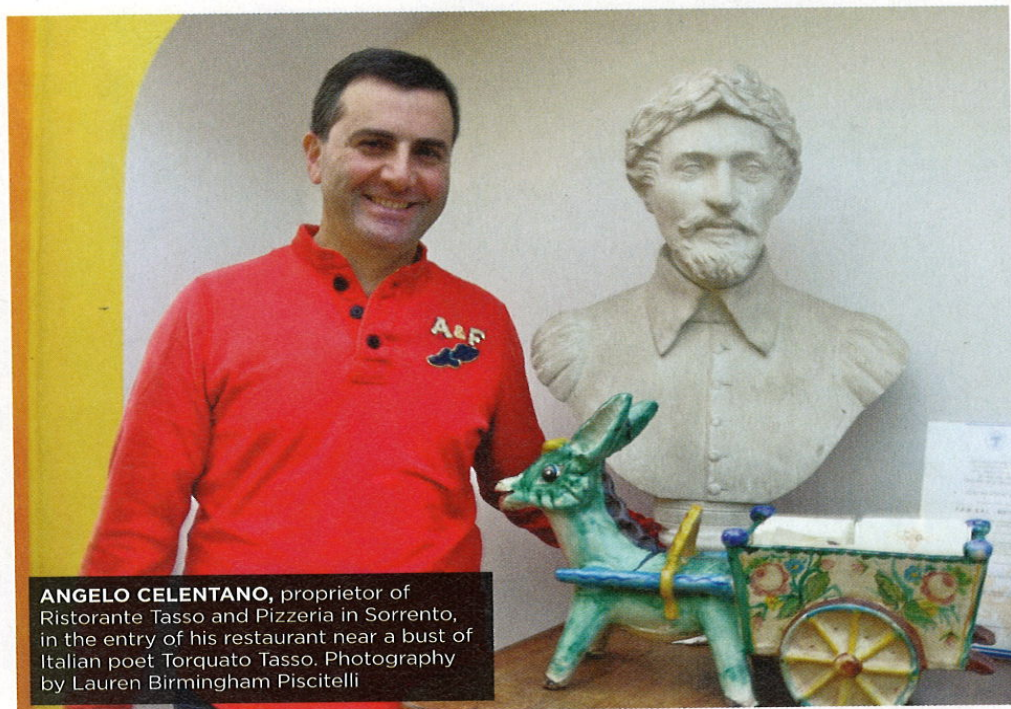
and butter are never used, only extra virgin olive oil.

"Our simple way of cooking with seasonal local produce, like the linguine and zucchini that you had for lunch, are examples of clean cuisine. Foods that are cooked with too many spices cover the flavor of the ingredients. In a plate of spaghetti, zucchini and Parmigiano, you need to taste the zucchini and Parmigiano; otherwise, it does not work," he says.

His philosophy in cooking not only advocates simplicity, but 'trasmettere emozioni.' "There's got to be emotion. Carrying a fresh fish right from the sea, bringing it to a client at the table, and then going in the kitchen to cook it, creates an atmosphere," he says.

And if it's true that you can judge a

**Chef Raffaele Porzio, executive pastry chef, mixes, whips, folds, bakes and glazes artful desserts in mignon style. Working in a pasticceria, he assembles the dessert portions, accompanied with assorted seasonal fruits, nuts, chocolate, gelato and sometimes limoncello, a lemon liqueur.**



**ANGELO CELENTANO**, proprietor of Ristorante Tasso and Pizzeria in Sorrento, in the entry of his restaurant near a bust of Italian poet Torquato Tasso. Photography by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

restaurant by its bread, then Ristorante Tasso hails 5 stars. Angelo says they make their bread daily from pizza dough. Their brick oven, which is deep, cavernous and wood-burning, churns out pizza Margherita, Marinara, Quattro Stagione in less than a minute. They also make Casatiello, a Neapolitan bread laced with small pieces of prosciutto, salumi e formaggio. Traditionally, this savory bread was made at home and incorporated into leftovers so nothing was wasted. It is baked golden on the outside and when sliced is rich and moist.

Angelo smiles wide as he says, "Italians love to eat! They always start with an antipasto, go onto pasta, and then secondo (the main course), which is very important for Italians." And they never skip dessert. Today, eating habits are changing and younger Italians are starting with an antipasto and going right to the secondo. "Tourists, however, order the pasta as their principal plate and then dessert," he adds.

At Tasso, fish is fresh and is brought each



day by the local fishermen. They set sail every night in wooden boats and return by early morning with daily catches of alici, merluzzo, spigola, pezzogna, gamberetti, and tonno, when in season. "They bring it to my door by 9 a.m.," Angelo says.

Executive Chef Franco Apreda heads the kitchen, spinning interpretations on favorites new and old: Caprese Salad with Fiascone Tomato, Basil and Olives; Pancetta-Wrapped Shrimp; Creamy Provolone Sauce and Sautéed Leeks; and Salt Cod with Beans and Sundried Tomato Puree.

Local wine complements local cuisine with regional Aglianico, Falanghina, Taurasi DOCG, Fiano, Greco, Biancolella and Per'e Palummo, and the restaurant's extensive wine cellar houses wines from all over Italy and the world.

Chef Raffaele Porzio, executive pastry chef, mixes, whips, folds, bakes and glazes artful desserts in mignon style. From a pasticceria, the second kitchen dedicated only for pastry making, he assembles mono portions accompanied with seasonal fruits, nuts, chocolate, gelato, reductions and sometimes limoncello.

My espresso arrives alongside a plate of golden biscotti. Luciano Pavarotti's rendition of "Torna a Surriento," a classic Neapolitan song, plays in the background. Its romantic lyrics have been calling visitors to return to Sorrento since its conception in 1902.

Ristorante Tasso is named after Torquato Tasso, a great Italian poet who was born in Sorrento in 1544. He went on to write "La Gerusalemme Liberata" (Jerusalem Delivered) in 1580. His poetic name will never be forgotten, especially at Ristorante Tasso, just off the square that takes his name.

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**OLD AND NEW** mingle in Sorrento, the birthplace of noted Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso, whose statue stands in the main square. At left, the popular Fauno Bar, built in 1950, is also located in the square. Photography by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli





## Native Intelligence



**NOT FAR FROM** Sorrento, the present Amalfi Cathedral dates from the early 1200s, and a ninth-century church is next door. There has been a church on this site since AD 596.





**CHIESA DEL CARMINE**, or Church of Carmine, was built in the late 16th century on the remains of an ancient church in Sorrento, which honored early martyrs.



# Native Intelligence

## Pancetta-Wrapped Shrimp, Creamy Provolone Sauce & Sautéed Leeks

- 16 large shrimp
- 8 pancetta slices, thin
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest, grated
- 6 mint leaves, chopped
- 1/4 cup capers, rinsed and chopped
- Oil, for frying
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 6 ounces escarole greens
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 14 ounces provolone
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 cups leeks, sliced thinly

Peel the shrimp, keeping the tail intact. Wrap half the shrimp with the thinly sliced pancetta. Sauté in a nonstick pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine the bread crumbs, lemon zest, mint, and capers. Toss the remaining 8 shrimp into the bread crumb mixture and coat. Fry the coated shrimp in hot oil. (You may do this in a deep skillet or in a deep fryer.) Remove the shrimp from the oil and drain on paper towels. Set aside.

In a skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil and sauté the escarole. Add the garlic and salt. Reduce the heat and set aside.

Place the milk and provolone in a double boiler. Heat the mixture until the cheese is just about melted, the texture of fondue, and take off the stove. In a separate pan, sauté the sliced leeks for a few seconds.

To serve, place two pancetta-wrapped shrimp and two fried shrimp in the middle of each plate, then spoon the fondue of provolone and a serving of escarole around the shrimp. Add a spoonful of leeks and drizzle with olive oil.

Makes 4 servings.

— Recipe courtesy of Ristorante Tasso, Sorrento

## Salt Cod Fish with Beans & Sundried Tomato Purée

- 1 medium celery stalk
- 1 medium carrot
- 1 medium onion
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup Borlotti beans, cooked (kidney or pinto beans may be substituted)
- 1/2 cup chickpeas, cooked
- 1/2 cup lentils, cooked
- 1/2 cup farro, cooked
- Fresh parsley, chopped
- Black or crushed red pepper, to taste
- Salt, to taste
- 8 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 fillets of dried cod, boneless, pre-soaked and cut into individual servings
- 8 to 10 sundried tomatoes
- Fresh parsley, black or crushed red pepper, and salt, for garnish

Dice the celery, carrot, and onion in about 1/8-inch cubes. Blanch briefly in boiling salted water, then drain, reserving some of the cooking water, and submerge in ice water for a few seconds.

In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil. Add the diced, blanched vegetables and sauté until softened. Add the cooked beans and farro, and about 1/4 cup of cooking water from the blanched vegetables if needed. Sprinkle with parsley, salt and pepper. Set aside.

In a skillet, heat 4 tablespoons olive oil and pan-grill the cod, turning until fully cooked.

Purée the sundried tomatoes in a food processor while drizzling with the remaining olive oil.

To serve, plate each dish with a spoonful of the beans and farro, codfish, and sundried tomato purée. Garnish with parsley, pepper, and salt.

Makes 4 servings.

— Recipe courtesy of Ristorante Tasso, Sorrento

## Tiramisu with Mascarpone & Amaretto Liqueur

- 1 1/2 cups of brewed espresso or very strong coffee
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 4 large eggs, yolks and whites separated
- 8 ounces mascarpone, at room temperature
- 2 cups Amaretto liqueur
- 14 ounces (1 3/4 cups) whipped cream
- 24 (about 14 ounces) ladyfingers
- Unsweetened cocoa powder, enough to coat the top

First, prepare the coffee, about 1 1/2 cups or enough to lightly soak the 24 ladyfingers. Pour into a bowl and stir in 2 tablespoons of sugar (more or less depending on desired level of sweetness), then set aside to cool.

With an electric mixer whisk the 4 egg yolks with 1/2 cup of sugar until the mixture is light and creamy.

In a separate bowl, mix the mascarpone with the Amaretto. Add the whipped cream and then whisk until smooth and creamy with no lumps.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites and add the remaining 1/2 cup of sugar until stiff peaks form. With a spatula, first fold in the egg yolk mixture into the mascarpone cream, mixing gently. Then gradually add the whipped egg whites, folding from the bottom and over. This will be the cream of the tiramisu.

Quickly roll half the ladyfingers in the sweetened coffee and line the bottom of a 9x13 inch pan. They should look moist from the outside but not completely soaked through.

Cover the ladyfingers on the bottom of the pan with half of the mascarpone cream. Then layer the second half of the soaked ladyfingers. Finish with the remaining cream and sprinkle the surface with cocoa powder. Chill for at least 3 hours (up to 8 hours) before serving.

Makes 8 servings.

— Recipe courtesy of Ristorante Tasso, Sorrento

## Caprese Salad with Tomato and Basil

- 14 ounces fresh mozzarella
- 1 to 2 large tomatoes, preferably Fiascone, Buffalo Heart or Beefsteak heirlooms
- 1 bunch fresh basil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground oregano
- Salt for seasoning
- Extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Wash the tomatoes and remove the tops and thoroughly dry. Slice the tomatoes lengthwise, about 1/2-inch thick. Slice the mozzarella into 1/2-inch rounds. Rinse the basil and dry the leaves gently. Plate each dish by fanning out the slices of tomatoes, then layer with slices of mozzarella. Add whole leaves of basil. You may also chop a few and sprinkle over, if desired. Season with a sprinkle of oregano, salt, and drizzle with olive oil.

Makes 4 servings.

— Recipe courtesy of Ristorante Tasso, Sorrento