



# Fast friends put food first

Campania connection between hotelier, restaurateur brings fine Italian cuisine back to Broadway

By: **Ben Sigurdson**

Posted: 4:14 PM CDT Thursday, Sep. 28, 2023

Last Modified: 4:31 PM CDT Thursday, Sep. 28, 2023 **Updates**

[Tweet](#)

[Share](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)



[Read Later](#)

A partnership and friendship 25 years in the making is bringing the taste of la dolce vita to downtown Winnipeg.

Vida Cucina Italia, a white-tablecloth Italian eatery, opens Friday in the Fort Garry Hotel in the space formerly known as the Broadway Room. It's the brainchild of Fort Garry owner/managing partner Ida Albo and Michelin-starred chef Rosanna Marziale, who first met in Winnipeg a quarter-century ago at the hotel.

"Rosanna was a celebrity chef that was brought in by Louis Tolaini, who was trying to start an Italian Chamber of Commerce," says Albo.

"They approached the hotel with Italian ownership to help sponsor the event, which of course we did readily and heartily. So Rosanna stayed at the hotel for a week as part of this project."



MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

The Fort Garry Hotel's Ida Albo (left) and Rosanna Marziale, a Michelin-starred chef from Italy, show off the rigatoni alla Genovese Napoletana (front left) and vitello tonnato from Vida Cucina Italia.

---

Over the course of that week Marziale and Albo became friends — despite the language barrier.

“She doesn’t speak English — it’s getting a little bit better, day by day — and I don’t really speak Italian, but I do make myself understood with a bastardized Neapolitan dialect,” says Albo, laughing, who serves as translator-on-the-fly while the pair are interviewed for this piece.

“Fortunately, Rosanna is Napolitano, and so she understood me. We developed our own language to a certain extent, and stayed friends despite the language barrier.”

As Italian chefs go, Marziale is somewhat of a rock star. She trained under Michelin-starred chefs in Spain and central Italy before taking over as head chef of Le Colonne, her family’s restaurant in the Campania region of Naples in southern Italy, where she earned a Michelin star of her own in 2013.

She’s also the world ambassador of Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP, the premium cheese that originates in Campania and is the basis of her signature dishes.

To top it all off, for the 60th anniversary of toymaker Mattel, she had a Barbie doll made in her image.

Albo reconnected with Marziale about eight years ago, when she went to Italy to learn about her late mother’s formative years.





MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Rosanna Marziale, a Michelin-starred chef from Italy, was in Winnipeg for the soon to open Vida Cucina Italia at the Fort Garry Hotel.

"I decided I wanted to learn how to make Neapolitan pizza. I'd lost my mom and I wanted to spend some time in Naples, where she was born — to just experience the language, the intonation of the accents," she says. "I took a course to become a certified pizza-maker."

Marziale happened to reach out to Albo a few weeks before her trip, and the pair reconnected over many meals. "She asked me, 'Why are you doing this?' I said, 'I don't know. I don't know why I'm doing it,'" Albo says. "But I needed to.

"I just wanted to learn something. And so we started our friendship up again."

The idea to work on some sort of project together came in 2019, at the same time

the Fort Garry was up for sale. (Albo subsequently took the hotel off the market in 2020; it became part of the Ascent Hotel Collection of Choice Hotels Canada.)

The pair embarked on extensive "research" for their new project.

"We travelled — we went to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New York, Toronto... we ate at a whole bunch of Italian restaurants, like three or three or four restaurants every day," Albo says.



As the Fort Garry Hotel underwent renovations during the COVID-19 pandemic — including the restoration of the Oval Room, the addition of the Sunset Terrace patio, the transformation of the Club Room into Yuk Yuk's and more — Albo realized they could bring their collaborative vision to life under the same roof.



MIKAELA MACKENZIE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

The interior of the Vida Cucina Italia restaurant at the Fort Garry Hotel.

The result is Vida, which sees the return of fine Italian cuisine to Broadway for the first time since Amici closed in 2017. A kitchen has been added next to the former Broadway Room, which has also seen the addition of a private room for larger groups.

Albo and Marziale pored over virtually every detail of the space.

“We worked with (French furniture designer) Roche Bobois for some of the features in this space, the table lights are from David Groppi, an Italian lighting specialist, the linens are Rivolta Carmignani... there are all of these little pieces, these little touches we’ve been working on,” says Albo.

Marziale, meanwhile, has created a menu that combines traditional Italian fare with her unique vision.

“I think the case in point would be the two signature dishes we have on the menu, especially la pizza al contrario,” says Albo. The dish is essentially an inverted pizza, with a crust made from stretched buffalo mozzarella, using a technique developed by Marziale called rimozzare. It’s topped with San Marzano tomatoes, basil cream and leaves, and extra virgin olive oil, before being finished off with crostini on top.



MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

La pizza al contrario is essentially an inverted pizza, with a crust made from stretched buffalo mozzarella, using a technique developed by chef Rosanna Marziale called rimozzare, topped with San Marzano tomatoes, basil cream and leaves, and extra virgin olive oil, before being finished off with crostini on top.

---

Marziale says something to Albo in Italian. “She says it’s one of those dishes she’ll be credited for when she’s no longer here, that she’ll be remembered for,” Albo translates.

Classic Italian dishes on the menu featuring Marziale’s modern touch include cacio e pepe, rigatoni alla genovese napoletana, chicken cacciatore, braised and glazed beef shoulder and eggplant parmesan. Vida will source some ingredients locally, while others will be imported by Mondo Foods and De Luca’s, including Marziale’s signature ingredient.

“The buffalo mozzarella we’re using for Rosanna’s signature dishes will be brought in from Italy,” says Albo.

“We tried making our own mozzarella here, but it doesn’t have the tang, and you need buffalo milk to get the tang.”

While Marziale will return to Winnipeg a few times a year to check in and update the offerings, she and Albo have assembled an on-the-ground collection of chefs, sous chefs and bakers with stellar pedigrees — most of whom, because of their background or work experience, speak Italian, which doesn’t hurt.



MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Vida Cucina Italia's semifreddo zuccotto colorato con mousse al cioccolato e pistacchio

After the extensive updates at the Fort Garry Hotel and the work in getting a new restaurant up and running, Albo doesn't have another big project in the foreseeable future.

"I think it's actually the opposite of that, actually," she says, laughing. "I think I'm just going to coast for a while."

For more information on the menu, the chef and to make reservations, see [vidacucinaitalia.com](http://vidacucinaitalia.com).

[ben.sigurdson@winnipegfreepress.com](mailto:ben.sigurdson@winnipegfreepress.com)

@bensigurdson



### Ben Sigurdson

*Literary editor, drinks writer*

Ben Sigurdson edits the Free Press books section, and also writes about wine, beer and spirits.

 [Read full biography](#)

## HISTORY

Updated on Thursday, September 28, 2023 4:31 PM CDT: Changes restaurant opening date for Web

---

Share



Print



Email



Read Later

---

REPORT ERROR

SUBMIT A TIP

The Free Press is certified by





## MORE STORIES

Cannabis candies were 'inadvertent' Halloween handout, woman says



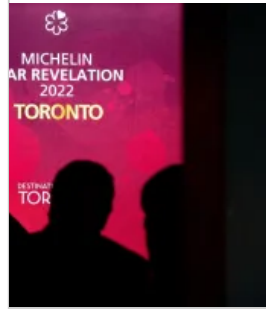
Construction firm files \$3.5-M lawsuit over renovation



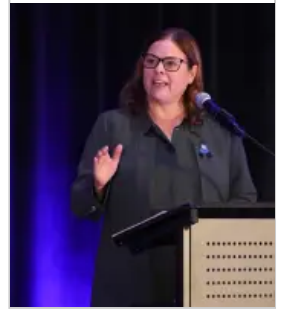
Wildfires can make your red wine taste like an ashtray. These scientists want to stop that



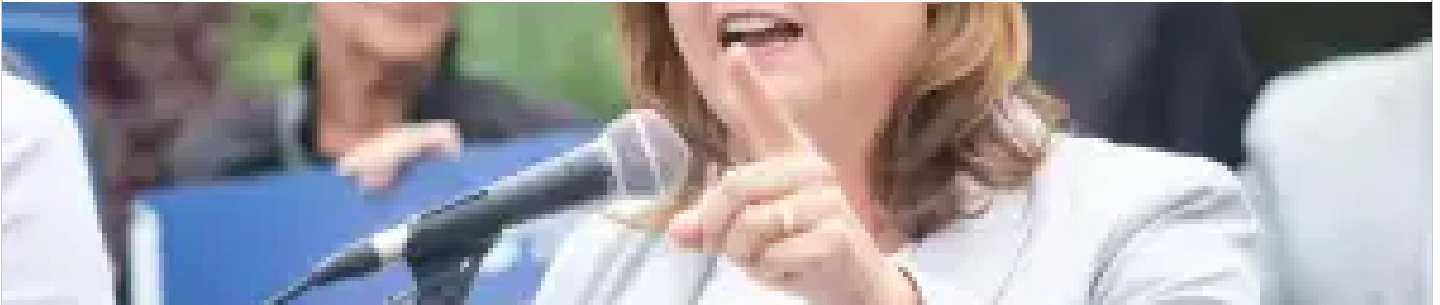
Two more Toronto restaurants get Michelin stars



Tories go all-in at election poker table: attack ad deals cards with insults, accusations about NDP candidates



Opinion: Letters, Sept. 28



©2023 Winnipeg Free Press