



## Authentic Italian Cuisine

An Interview with  
**Gianfranco Sorrentino, Owner, Il Gattopardo,  
 The Leopard at des Artistes, and Mozzarella & Vino**



*Gianfranco Sorrentino with wife Paula Bolla-Sorrentino (left) and Executive Chef Vito Gnazzo (above)*

**EDITORS' NOTE** Originally from Naples, Italy, Gianfranco Sorrentino carries over 44 years of experience in restaurant management at properties including Quisisana Hotel in Capri, Dorchester Hotel in London, Four Seasons Hotel in Tokyo, and Bice Restaurant in New York. In 1990, he opened Sette MoMA Restaurant at The Museum of Modern Art of New York (1990-2002). In September 2001, he opened Il Gattopardo, across the street from MoMA, along with his wife, Paula Bolla-Sorrentino, and his Executive Chef Vito Gnazzo. In 2002, they opened Union Bar and Grill in Great Barrington, Massachusetts (2002-2006). In May 2011, they opened The Leopard at des Artistes, located in the New York landmark Hotel des Artistes and, in 2014, their newest restaurant, Mozzarella & Vino, opened in the old Il Gattopardo space, directly across from MoMA. Il Gattopardo moved down the block to its current location in the historically landmarked Rockefeller Townhouses.



*Gianfranco Sorrentino*

offers a “BYOB Italian Sunday Supper,” with waived corkage fees and exceptional staff pairing recommendations. A three-course tasting menu is also offered seven days a week.

Mozzarella & Vino ([mozzarellaevino.com](http://mozzarellaevino.com)), located in the former space of Il Gattopardo, across from MoMA on 54th Street, is the more rustic and casual sibling. Its concept reflects the simplicity of authentic Italian ingredients, with a heavy emphasis on the Mozzarella di bufala Campana, Italian cheeses, and affettati. The enoteca style bar focuses on

showcasing rather smaller family estates and independent Italian winemakers with history, quality, and good value.

### Would you provide an overview of your three restaurants?

They each have their own distinct personalities, and are all very different from one another in a few ways, but they're all run with the same underlying concept: use the freshest, purest ingredients, and simple cooking techniques that will enhance the products. Regarding our wines, we tend to prefer the smaller producers, many of them family-owned. We love to share with our guests the artisan wines versus the bigger, mass-produced or industrial wines. My wife, Paula, Vito Gnazzo (our partner and Executive Chef), and I go to Italy two or three times a year to search for new products, new farmers and producers, and new wineries.

### How critical is it to continue to invest in the best products and ingredients available?

It's so very important to know exactly what we're eating – what we're putting in our bodies – as well as how that food was produced. In this age of GMO's, hormones, steroids etc., we are constantly looking for farmers and producers that share our ideas and our values of pure living. High-quality ingredients cost more, but it is an investment that we make for our bodies and souls. We invest energy, time, and money to make sure the products we buy are the best, but we try to make sure that they are priced correctly.

### Would you discuss the opportunities for growth for your catering operations?

In terms of revenue in this division, we increased our business by approximately 30 percent last year. Our customers know that they will benefit from the same cuisine, the same

attention to detail, the same high standard of attentive service, and the same level of warm Italian hospitality that we give to our a la carte guests at the restaurants. We might even turn away some business when the clients ask for something, which is not really representative of Il Gattopardo Group. Maybe they request some different kind of cuisine or a format that we feel doesn't best represent us.

We only do what we think we are good at. There are so many catering companies that can prepare Chinese, Japanese, American, French, or some average, inauthentic Italian cuisine, but if one wants to have a really authentic Italian experience, they have to come to Il Gattopardo.

### What is on the horizon with regard to the new pastry partnership?

I always believed that the most authentic Italian cuisine is made with the best ingredients, the best products. We spend a great deal of time on finding what we are really looking for. It has always been my dream to own a bakery or a pastry store; not an ordinary bakery, but a really authentic Italian pastry store.

We are now partnering with one of the best Italian Pastry Chefs, Pietro Macellaro, and my dream is coming true. We will use only the very best chocolates, herbs, and other ingredients, which he grows on his property in Piaggine (in Campania). If this particular concept is as successful as we think it will be, over the next few years, we will probably open more in other major U.S. markets.

### How important is it for you to find the time to be in the restaurants, talking with and listening to your guests?

Our guests are the restaurants' main assets, plain and simple. Without them, we would not exist, and this is one of the big reasons that we cannot replicate Il Gattopardo or The Leopard at des Artistes. We give that special personal attention to all of our guests, and expanding too much could mean diluting that special attention we offer. We don't want “cookie-cutter,” and if we let that happen, we'll end up being McDonald's for the rich and famous.

What's funny is, after so many years in this business, I find myself now serving the sons of my oldest guests. I have been serving them since they were very young and they would come in with their fathers and mothers, and now they are professionals with their own lives and families. In some way, I feel that this is the second act of my life. ●

**RESTAURANT BRIEFS** Il Gattopardo ([ilgattopardonyc.com](http://ilgattopardonyc.com)) serves traditional Southern Italian comfort food that has been adapted for the contemporary palate without compromising the authenticity of the cuisine. The restaurant is committed to producing top quality Southern Italian gastronomy, from using authentic ingredients to keeping the tradition of Italian culture and hospitality vibrant and passionate.

Lunch and dinner are both served at Il Gattopardo, and a “Brunch Italiano” is served on the weekends in the beautiful, lushly planted six-story Atrium (with live jazz and bossa nova on Saturdays).

The Leopard at des Artistes ([theleopardnyc.com](http://theleopardnyc.com)) is located in one of the most iconic spaces in New York City, the historically landmarked Hotel des Artistes. The Leopard finds its roots in the area once known as “The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies,” and in the culinary traditions of the regions of Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Apulia, Sardinia, and Sicily. The dishes are a balance of rural elements from these regions and include pasta, vegetables, cheese, and seafood ingredients from the Costiera.

The restaurant serves dinner seven nights a week, along with “Brunch at des Artistes” on weekends. On Sunday evenings, The Leopard