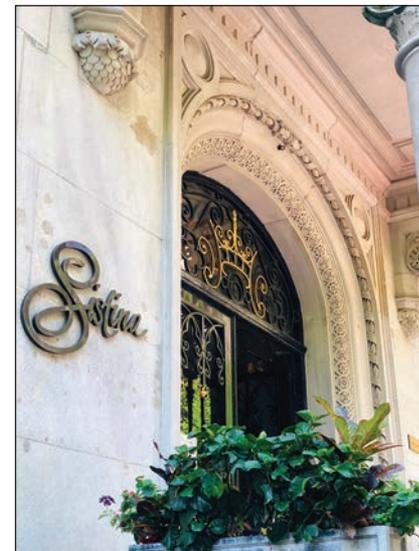
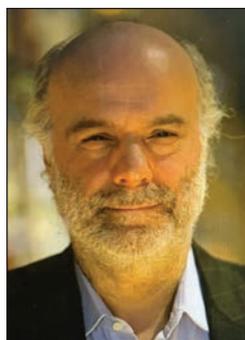


The Relationship Business

**An Interview with Giuseppe Bruno,
Owner and Executive Chef, Sistina Restaurant and Caravaggio Restaurant**



EDITORS' NOTE *It all began with an idea. Add fresh produce, impeccable recipes and a large amount of passion and thus Sistina Restaurant (sistinany.com) was born. Located in the heart of Manhattan's glamorous Upper East Side, Giuseppe Bruno's cutting-edge concept carries on the long-lived family tradition of serving great food to his devoted patrons and to the greater New York area. He believes in fresh comfort food which is the wisdom of his Salerno ancestors from Southern Italy. Bruno goes to the market daily to pick the freshest that the market can offer – from fish to meat, and vegetables from local farmers. After spending 33 years on Second Avenue, Sistina has relocated to a gorgeous townhouse on 81st Street between Madison and 5th Avenue. Its sister restaurant, Caravaggio (caravaggio ristorante.com), is located on East 74th Street across from the Whitney Museum of Art and serves elegant, sophisticated Italian cuisine with a modern twist.*



Giuseppe Bruno

It starts with loving what you do and wanting to take care of people. I do not see the people who come to my restaurants as customers – they are friends and I have built relationships with them over many years. Business leaders come to our restaurants to close deals, to hire new executives, to discuss problems and so on. They know that we respect their privacy and are here for them when they need something, but will provide them the space and comfort to do what they need to do. I am always at the restau-

rants going from the kitchen to the dining room to wave hello or acknowledge our guests. This business is about relationships and to build a sustainable restaurant, you need to get to know your guests and build their trust.



The entrance (top right) and interior of Sistina Restaurant

Did you know at an early age that your passion was to become a chef?

I grew up in Italy and our family had very little. At that time, after World War II, they had set up schools in Italy to teach young boys the skills needed to work in the fine dining business. I went to these schools, as did my brothers, and graduated after five years. During the summers we would do internships and get real life training and experience. I realized at a young age from my experiences in school and internships that I loved the business. It is hard work with long hours and lots of pressure, so the only way to be successful is if you really love it and it is your passion.

My vision was to provide special moments and to cook for people who were celebrating special events, from birthdays to weddings to anniversaries. We cannot make mistakes and need to always be at the top of our game since these special moments only happen once in a person's life and they will be remembered forever. It is a privilege to be able to be a part of these special times in our customers' lives.

What have been the keys to creating restaurants like Sistina and Caravaggio that have such a loyal following and are so well-respected?

I also believe that you have to offer the best products and highest quality ingredients. I still go to the market daily to pick the freshest that the market can offer – from fish to meat, and vegetables from local farmers. This is where it starts and if you want to offer the best to your guests, you need to be involved in the process from start to finish.

Your guests are captains of industry and leaders in their fields who are known to have specific tastes and demands. How are you able to keep them all happy?

These people reached the top of their professions because they are driven and

focused. It is true that they have egos and expect the best, which is part of what has made them so successful. When they want to come to my restaurants, they don't call a main number for a reservation – they call my cell phone. I handle their request and know what table they want to be seated at and what their preferences are when they arrive. In order to offer a truly special experience and to exceed the expectations of our guests, it is essential that I get to know them and have a relationship with them so that I can anticipate their wants and needs without them even saying anything. I am a chef and provide great food, wine and service, but at the end of the day, I am in the relationship business.

What do you look for when hiring talent for the restaurants?

I look for people who have a good education since I believe that education goes a long way. When you are in school, you are taught to listen to the teacher and you learn discipline. These are important skills to be successful in our business – listening and discipline. It is then my responsibility to invest the time and energy to teach them the specifics of how we do things and to provide an opportunity for them to learn and grow in our company. We are busy serving our guests all day and night and it can be stressful and challenging, but I always try to take moments to check and see how my team is doing and if they need anything from me. I am the leader of this company and the buck stops with me. I believe that leadership is about taking responsibility and providing an example for your team.

You devote your time and energy to philanthropy and have been very active in raising money to address the issue of brain tumors in children. Will you discuss this work?

I knew the person at NewYork-Presbyterian who was leading the focus on pediatric brain tumors and this is an issue that I am very passionate about supporting. I have seen over the years how the business leaders and VIPs who come to my restaurants give back to important causes and are so generous with their time and money. This is part of being a leader – it is about more than focusing on yourself, but how you can help others that are less fortunate and in need. We have hosted dinners and raised a lot of money for this effort and it is so rewarding for me. As much as I love my restaurants and my business, giving back and helping children who are in need gives me the most pleasure in my life. ●