

A Relationship Business

An Interview with Claudio Mambelli, General Manager, Il Mulino

RESTAURANT BRIEF For over 40 years, Il Mulino (ilmulino.com) restaurant on West 3rd Street in Greenwich Village has remained top rated in New York's elite dining scene. With an emphasis on authentic preparations from the Abruzzo region of Italy, Il Mulino delivers expertly crafted dishes with exemplary service.



Claudio Mambelli

What has made Il Mulino such an institution in New York?

It has taken a lot of hard work and long days – in other words, blood, sweat and tears. It is about the entire Il



U.S. Presidents Clinton and Obama exiting Il Mulino (above); Il Mulino and a sample of its dishes

Mulino experience, from the quality of the food to the high level of service to the strong relationships with our clientele. It is like when you build a building – it is not done with just one brick; it takes each brick coming together to make it work.

It is not easy to be in the restaurant business today with the high cost of food and many other expenses. The margins are so small, but at Il Mulino we never sacrifice quality and service since this is what we are known for, and this is what our guests expect.



We are blessed to have a clientele that has been coming to Il Mulino for many years and are very loyal to the restaurant. There are clients who have moved out of New York and who live all over the world, but when they come back to visit, they come to Il Mulino. It is extremely rewarding to be a part of a team that has built this level of loyalty and trust with our patrons.

The restaurant business is known for high turnover, but Il Mulino has a staff that has been with the restaurant for many years. How important has this consistency been to the success of Il Mulino?

We have been fortunate to retain our staff who are very committed to Il Mulino and to our clients. We invest in our team, and we expect them to be invested with us. When you have guests that have been coming to Il Mulino for over 40 years, there is something special about seeing the same staff who know you and know what you like. This is the meaning of service.



When you look back more than 40 years ago when you joined Il Mulino, could you have imagined that this would be a place where you would spend your career?

I started working here in 1982 or 1983 – it has been so long it is hard to remember – and it was an experience. It was not an easy job and my bosses were tough, but I gave everything I had and did my job. This is true of any business – if you work hard and do things the right way, you will get opportunities.

I never thought that I would be here all this time, but the people made me want to stay. We have such an amazing clientele and this is a people business, so there was never a reason to leave. I have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people who are not only clients, but



have become friends. Il Mulino is a place where some of the biggest business deals have been discussed, some of the biggest business deals have been made, and some of the biggest business deals have been celebrated. It doesn't get much better than that.

How has Il Mulino adapted to stay relevant to meet the needs of today's clients?

You always need to evolve and adapt to stay relevant. We go with the times and respond to the needs and wants of our guests, whether that relates to more casual dress, healthy food offerings, or any other request. We are in the service business, and our focus is on meeting the needs of our clientele and exceeding their expectations. Always.

How critical has it been to have owners who are so committed to the success of the restaurant?

Everything starts from the top, and we are very fortunate to have owners who want to be the best and give us the tools and resources to succeed. Ownership sets the tone and drives the culture, and it is our job to execute.



What has kept the business so exciting for you after all these years?

When you meet a guest for the first time, and then start to build a relationship as they come back time after time, it is a special feeling. There is always an excitement to see who walks through our door each night, and then to be given the opportunity to serve and provide a memorable experience – that is the definition of hospitality. ●