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NEWS: **ARTS & LEISURE**

A Hidden Gem — For Now

by **Marc Ferris**
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Magazzino café offers a taste of Italy

Fast to flash a quicksilver smile, chef Luca Galli is a born schmoozer who enjoys lingering over a well-prepared meal or cup of espresso. But when duty calls in the kitchen, he is serious as a surgeon.

Galli is developing the menu at Café Silvia, a restaurant and beverage oasis in the new Robert Olnick Pavilion at Magazzino Italian Art in Philipstown. It is named for Olnick's wife, Silvia, mother of Nancy, who founded the museum along with her husband, Giorgio Spanu.

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Chef Luca Galli (Photo by Matt Borkowski/Magazzino)

Over the last six months, in-the-know locals consider it to be a best-kept secret — and one open on Mondays.

"It's a divine hidden gem that has resonated in the community," says Melissa Meyers, a Garrison resident and neighbor of Spanu and Olnick. "I had heard about this project and never expected it to be this wonderful. You look out and it feels like Tuscany."

She refers to the picture window that offers a view of the donkey corral, 20 garden beds for growing ingredients and a ridge in the background. The café doubles as the museum gift shop and the concrete confines are surprisingly cozy. An interior window peeks in on one of the pavilion's galleries.

Café Silvia (Photo by Marco Anelli and Tommaso Sacconi/Magazzino)

Spanu and Olnick met Galli 20 years ago in Italy. They make

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him feel at home by providing a culinary playground with two critical Italian imports. Standing in the near-pristine kitchen, Galli beams with pride over his Unox oven and Irinox blast chiller, which execute myriad food preparation techniques at the press of a digital button.

Galli, who lives in Garrison, goes for simple, subtle and delicate. “If the waiter has to explain the dish, the flavors are going to be difficult to identify,” he says.

Toasted bread with grilled eggplant, burrata and Milano salami

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He started easy, with panini and a frittata of the day made with eggs from Spanu and Olnick's farm. He recently introduced lasagna Bolognese, chickpea and scallop soup and ravioli with spinach and ricotta cheese and a light dusting of Parmesan cheese. Fish and vegetable dishes are in the works.

Also a sommelier, Galli will expand the wine list from the current selections of red, white and prosecco. By late spring, when the patio opens, the plan is to transform it into a trattoria apertivo with small plates and boards filled with meat and cheese.

"I have a lot of ideas, but I'm not going to rush anything," he says.

Galli, who was born near Milan, worked in restaurant kitchens in Italy, London and New York City. He also spent 15 years cooking on yachts that sailed the Mediterranean Sea and beyond.

The attention to detail at Café Silvia can be remarkable. Serving trays are lined with sticky rubber, and Galli worked with his coffee consultant in Italy to test the water's pH level to determine the ideal beans to use in the espresso (a blend of Arabica and Robusto to add acidity). He even calibrates the coffee grinder.

Only observant visitors will notice the fresh-made jams, soups and sauces packed in sealable jars tucked onto shelves below the main counter.

A chest-high window opens into the kitchen, where the chef and his assistants, Jack Cimino and Robert Betterbid, improvise dance moves like the twist or shoulder shimmy to avoid colliding.

With 40 indoor seats and 20 more outside, the place can get busy in a hurry. Galli spoke about building bonds with his staff, which is pivotal to delivering on the vision. "My expectations are high, even for myself," he says.

Enjoying a dish during downtime, Cimino turns introspective. "When I started here, I was unmotivated, depressed and had no lust for life," he says.

Latte macchiato

"I was this close to firing him," says Galli, almost pinching together his thumb and index finger.

"He pushed me in a way that drew me out of my shell and instilled a strong work ethic," says Cimino, who lives in Cold Spring. "I thank him for bringing new value to my life."

Then, a group of diners arrived just before closing time. Like athletes called into the game, the men clicked into performance mode.

Café Silvia, located at 2700 Route 9 in Philipstown, is open Friday to Monday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Beginning April 5, and continuing on select Fridays through September, Galli will prepare and discuss meals from nine Italian regions. Tickets are $50 at magazzino.art.

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