



At Palazzo Tornabuoni, Silvio Ursini (in glasses) and Rolando Beramendi taste wines to pair with a fennel-and-pecorino salad (recipe, p. 116).



Talk of Tuscany: Osteria Tornabuoni

After elevating mozzarella to cult status with his Obikà cafés, Bulgari's Silvio Ursini is taking on Tuscany with his new restaurant, Osteria Tornabuoni.

by elizabeth helman minchilli photographs by martin morrell

STANDING UNDERNEATH A STUCCOED ARCHWAY in Florence's 15th-century Palazzo Tornabuoni, Silvio Ursini calls his friends to the table. Dressed in a custom shirt and slim Loro Piana trousers, the Bulgari executive wants feedback on the dishes he's planning to

offer at Osteria Tornabuoni, his restaurant on the ground floor of the Palazzo, set to open in March. This afternoon, that means intensely artichoke custards with a fava bean sauce and skewers of sausage, chicken livers and crusty bread, grilled until deliciously charred (recipes, p. 118).



“I develop restaurants that are ingredient-based, not chef-based,” says Ursini, who created the Obikà mozzarella bars.

Having traveled the world for Bulgari, Ursini has a global outlook and sensibility, but he’s deeply Italian in his passion for his country’s traditional foods. “I like to develop restaurants that are ingredient-based, not chef-based,” he says. In 2004, he opened an innovative mozzarella bar in Rome called Obikà—Neopolitan for “Here it is!” Obikà elevates mozzarella to cult status, treating it with the same reverence that the Japanese do raw fish: The cheese is on display in glass cases, as fish is in a sushi bar, and the most popular dish is a tasting platter of three mozzarellas. The café expanded to seven cities—one opened in New York City last year—and Ursini has plans for six more worldwide, including one in the Palazzo Tornabuoni complex.

Ursini’s new restaurant is equally ingredient-centric. “At Osteria, I decided to include only dishes from Tuscany, using only Tuscan ingredients,” he says in effortlessly fluent English. “This is not about being a locavore—although that is nice, too—but about creating something with a true soul.” To develop the menu, Ursini called on his friend Rolando Beramendi, who spent 25 years in the restaurant and food-importing business in New York City and San Francisco. “The beauty of focusing on one region is that it has forced us to discover some really fantastic things,” Ursini says. “Instead of including a dozen cheeses from all over Italy, we have a selection of six pecorinos from different parts of Tuscany.” For instance, slivers of aged pecorino from Pienza top a salad of thinly sliced fennel (recipe,

Elizabeth Helman Minchilli lives in Rome and is the author of seven books, including the forthcoming Casa Rustica.

{ SILVIO'S BLACK BOOK }

florence travel picks

HOTELS

J.K. Place A former private residence, now a 20-room hotel. Ursini likes the cozy atmosphere. *Doubles from \$453; Piazza Santa Maria Novella 7; 011-39-055-26-45-181 or jkplace.com.*

Lungarno Suites Down the street from the Uffizi Gallery with views of the Ponte Vecchio. Ursini sometimes uses the spacious suites as an office and cooks in the small kitchens. *Doubles from \$383; Lungarno Acciaiuoli 4; 011-39-055-2726-8000 or lungarnosuites.com.*

Villa San Michele Just outside the city center. Ursini likes the suites with private gardens. *Doubles from \$1,134; Via Doccia 4, Fiesole; 011-39-055-567-8200 or villasanmichele.com.*

RESTAURANTS

Buca dell'Orafo A favorite of Ursini’s father’s for Tuscan classics like *ribollita* and *bistecca alla fiorentina*. *Via de’Girolami 28; 011-39-055-213-619.*

Osteria Tornabuoni Ursini’s new restaurant in Florence’s Palazzo Tornabuoni focuses on Tuscany, from the meats and cheeses to the wines. *Via dei Corsi 5R; osteriatornabuoni.it.*

Q.B. Quantobasta “This restaurant and wine bar just opened, so I have only been there a few times, but I loved the Lasagnette Croccante al Rosmarino (crispy rosemary lasagna),” Ursini says. *Via de Ginori 10/r; 011-39-055-211-427 or quantobasta.eu.*



Ursini's wife, Desiree, BELOW, gets feedback from guests on their favorite dishes for the menu at Osteria Tornabuoni.

{ RESTAURANT PREVIEW }

ultra tuscan dinner menu

..... **ANTIPASTO**

fennel and aged pecorino salad
2007 Teruzzi & Puthod Rondolino
Vernaccia di San Gimignano

..... **PRIMO**

artichoke custards with fava bean sauce
2007 Poggio al Tesoro Solosole Vermentino

..... **SECONDI**

sausage, bread and chicken liver spiedini
white beans in tomato sauce
2006 Melini Isassi Chianti Classico

..... **DOLCE**

frozen chocolate-chip meringata
2003 Castellare S. Niccolò vin santo

p. 116). Most of these ingredients, as well as many of the wines on Osteria's exclusively Tuscan wine list, are available for purchase in the shop at the restaurant's entrance.

The Osteria will also serve as the in-house caterer to the 36 fractional-ownership apartments in the Palazzo (one of Florence's most important buildings, which dominates the city's main shopping street, Via Tornabuoni). Superstar Florentine designer Michele Bonan redid the interiors, including kitchens outfitted in sleek Boffi cabinets and crystal chandeliers. He also designed Osteria Tornabuoni with a mix of new pieces and antiques, like an iron bar from an old butcher shop in England, from which cured meats hang.



As the staff clears the plates, Ursini asks the guests for their thoughts on the *meringata*, two crispy meringue discs sandwiching frozen whipped cream studded with shards of chocolate, all topped with a warm chocolate-and-espresso sauce (recipe, p. 116). Jacopo Mazzei, the chief executive of Palazzo Tornabuoni and a member of the prominent Mazzei wine family (one of the founders of the Chianti designation), gives his approval. Ursini sips one of Mazzei's Chiantis, which will be on the wine list at Osteria, and nods in satisfaction: "What I have tried to do is go back to the reason we all love Tuscany—the food, and the ingredients. In the end, that is what people want, no?"



With a double crust of meringue, this vanilla-cream cake with a warm chocolate-esspresso sauce is crunchy and gooey.

Frozen Chocolate-Chip Meringata

ACTIVE: 1 HR; TOTAL: 12 HR

8 TO 10 SERVINGS

Meringata—Italian for “meringue cake”—is an elegant yet homey frozen dessert of whipped cream sandwiched between meringue rounds. Rolando Beramendi slices the *meringata* and serves it with a warm chocolate-esspresso sauce. He says the traditional Tuscan sweet wine vin santo is terrific with this dish, especially the citrus-peel-scented 2003 Castellare S. Niccolò.

6 large egg whites,
at room temperature

½ teaspoon cream of tartar

1½ cups granulated sugar

½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

2¼ cups heavy cream

¼ cup confectioners' sugar

1 pound bittersweet chocolate,
finely chopped

¼ cup hot brewed espresso

1. Preheat the oven to 225° and position racks in the lower and middle thirds. Trace an 11-inch circle on the undersides of each of 2 sheets of parchment paper. Turn the paper over onto 2 large baking sheets.

2. In the bowl of a standing electric mixer fitted with the whisk, beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar at medium speed

until foamy. Increase the speed to high and beat until soft peaks form. Add the granulated sugar 1 tablespoon at a time, beating for 5 seconds between additions. Add the vanilla and beat until the whites are stiff and glossy, about 4 minutes.

3. Transfer half of the meringue to a pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch plain round tip and pipe a ring of meringue just inside each drawn circle. Spoon the remaining meringue into the circles and spread it ½ inch thick. Bake the meringues for about 1½ hours, until very pale but dry. Turn off the oven, prop the door open slightly and let the meringues cool in the oven for at least 6 hours, until dry and crisp.

4. In a bowl, using an electric mixer, beat 2 cups of the cream with the confectioners' sugar until firm. Fold in one-fourth of the chocolate. Spread the cream over 1 round, spreading it to the edge. Top with the second round, pressing it lightly. Freeze until the cream is firm, about 4 hours.

5. Meanwhile, melt the remaining chocolate in a bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Off the heat, whisk in the remaining ¼ cup of cream and the espresso.

6. Using a serrated knife, cut the frozen cake into wedges and transfer to plates. Let stand for 10 minutes. Spoon some of the sauce on each wedge and serve.

Fennel and Aged Pecorino Salad

TOTAL: 20 MIN

6 SERVINGS

This crisp salad combines fennel, scallions and parsley with shavings of sharp, salty aged pecorino cheese; the pecorino from the small Tuscan town of Pienza is especially tasty. Try the dish with a bottle of Vernaccia di San Gimignano, the classic, floral Tuscan white. The crisp 2007 Teruzzi & Puthod Rondolino is good, as is the citrusy 2007 Cecchi Castello Montaúto.

1½ tablespoons red wine vinegar

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper

2 large fennel bulbs (2 pounds)—
halved, cored and very thinly
sliced, fronds reserved

2 scallions, white and green parts,
thinly sliced

½ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves

5 ounces aged pecorino, shaved
(2 cups)

In a large bowl, whisk the red wine vinegar and the olive oil; season generously with salt and pepper. Add the sliced fennel, scallions, parsley leaves and shaved pecorino and toss the salad gently. Transfer the salad to plates, garnish with the fennel fronds and serve right away.

Artichoke Custards with Fava Bean Sauce

ACTIVE: 40 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR 30 MIN

6 SERVINGS

In an homage to spring, Beramendi makes these lush custards with fresh artichokes; the flavor is wonderfully vivid. For artichokes, choose an herbal white wine like the 2007 Poggio al Tesoro Solosole Vermentino.

½ lemon

4 artichokes (about 8 ounces each)

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream

3 large eggs, at room temperature, beaten

Kosher salt and freshly ground

white pepper

Boiling water

¾ cup frozen fava beans

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, minced

½ teaspoon chopped sage

½ teaspoon chopped rosemary

1 tomato—peeled, seeded and chopped

1. Preheat the oven to 325°. Butter six 4-ounce ramekins and set them in a medium baking dish. Fill a bowl with cold water and squeeze the lemon juice into it. Working with 1 artichoke at a time, snap off the outer leaves and trim off all but 1 inch of the stem. Cut off the remaining leaves at the top of the heart and peel the base and stem. Halve the artichoke and scoop out the furry choke. Add the heart to the lemon water and repeat.

2. In a saucepan of boiling water, cook the artichokes until tender, 10 minutes; drain and transfer to a food processor. Add 2 tablespoons of the cream; puree until smooth. Press the puree through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Whisk in the remaining cream along with the eggs and season with ½ teaspoon of salt and a pinch of white pepper.

3. Pour the custard into the ramekins. Fill the dish with enough boiling water to reach halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake the custards for 45 minutes, until a knife inserted in the centers comes out clean. Remove the ramekins from the water.

4. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan of boiling water, cook the fava beans for 5 minutes. Drain, reserving ¼ cup of the water. Transfer the favas and the reserved water to a food processor and puree until smooth.

5. In a skillet, heat the oil. Add the garlic, sage and rosemary and cook over moderate heat for 1 minute. Add the tomato and cook, stirring and mashing, for 5 minutes. Add the puree and cook until heated through. Season with salt and white pepper.

6. Run the blade of a thin knife around each custard and invert onto plates. Spoon the sauce around the custards and serve.

White Beans in Tomato Sauce

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR

6 SERVINGS

This lush, stewlike dish is typically made with *zolfini* beans, a pale yellow Tuscan legume that can be challenging to find in the U.S.; firm, creamy cannellini beans are an excellent substitute.

2 cups dried *zolfini* or cannellini beans, picked over and rinsed

1 sage sprig, plus ½ teaspoon chopped sage

2 garlic cloves, 1 minced

1 small bay leaf

¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

1 cup canned tomato sauce

Freshly ground pepper

1. Cover the beans with 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Cover and remove from the heat. Let stand for 1 hour, then drain.

2. Cover the beans with 4 inches of fresh water. Add the sage sprig, whole garlic clove, bay leaf and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Bring to a boil and cook over moderately low heat for 30 minutes. Season the beans with salt and cook for about 15 minutes longer, until the beans are tender; drain and discard the sage, garlic and bay leaf.

3. Meanwhile, in a medium, deep skillet, heat the remaining ¼ cup of oil. Add the chopped sage and minced garlic and cook over moderate heat for 1 minute. Add the tomato sauce and bring to a simmer.

4. Add the beans to the skillet and cook, stirring, until saucy and thick, 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

Sausage, Bread and Chicken Liver Spiedini

ACTIVE: 45 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR

6 SERVINGS

Spiedini are pieces of meat and other foods grilled on skewers. "Sausages and chicken livers are staples of Tuscan cuisine," says Beramendi, "and there's nothing better with them than a full-bodied Chianti Classico." Two great bottlings are the cherry-accented 2006 Melini Isassi and the Mazzei family's graceful 2006 Castello di Fonterutoli Poggio alla Badiola.

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup dry red wine

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon chopped rosemary

½ teaspoon juniper berries, crushed

½ pound chicken livers, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch pieces

Salt and freshly ground pepper

6 sweet Italian sausages

1 loaf crusty peasant bread, cut into 1½-inch cubes

About 36 small fresh bay leaves

1. In a bowl, combine ¼ cup of the oil with the wine, garlic, rosemary, juniper berries and chicken livers. Season with salt and pepper and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour. Drain, reserving the marinade.

2. Meanwhile, in a saucepan of boiling water, cook the sausages over high heat until cooked through, 10 minutes; let cool slightly. Cut each sausage into thirds.

3. Light a grill. On six 14-inch long skewers, alternately thread the sausages, bread and livers very loosely, placing a bay leaf between each piece. Be sure to leave a tiny bit of space between each piece for even cooking.

4. Brush the skewers with the remaining ¼ cup of olive oil and some of the marinade and grill over moderately low heat, turning frequently, until the chicken livers are cooked and the bread cubes and sausages are lightly charred, about 10 minutes. Transfer to plates and serve. ●