

San Pietro

Biography

Antonio Bruno,
Executive Chef, San Pietro

Antonio Bruno is Executive Chef of San Pietro, and the inspirational force behind the restaurant's historic cuisine, which focuses on the healthy, vivacious tastes of Campania, in southern Italy. Born in 1957 in Salerno, Antonio graduated from the Culinary Institute of Potenza in 1973. Looking back, Antonio feels that the Institute was the best boot camp for a culinary education because professors would give students only three ingredients to build a menu: olive oil, vinegar and tomatoes.

Upon graduation, Antonio trained in classic northern and southern Italian cuisine at a number of well-known hotels and restaurants in Italy: the Rizzi in Rome, the Hotel Amalfi in Venice and La Rina Ristorante in Genoa – the latter under Chef Carlo Bissolotti, from whom he learned the fine art of preparing fish.

When Antonio immigrated to the States with his brothers in 1976, he was astonished at what was being presented as southern Italian cuisine. Veal parmigiana, he points out, is really an American-Italian invention. Serving meat with a side dish of pasta is also not a typical practice in Italy. Nonetheless, Antonio received excellent training at a number of fine Italian restaurants in New York City.

Because Antonio and his brother, Gerardo, felt that Manhattan lacked a true representation of southern Italian cuisine, they decided to open their own restaurant, Sistina, on East 81st Street, in 1984. It became an overnight success. Whenever Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni came to Manhattan, he would go straight to Sistina's kitchen and whip up his own home-style dishes, to the amusement of Antonio and his brothers. In 1992, Antonio and Gerardo opened a larger establishment, San Pietro, on Manhattan's elegant East 54th Street. Today, Antonio has designed a menu for San Pietro that is based on the ancient "prescription" of a healthy, balanced diet from the renowned Salerno School of Medicine in the 10th through the 12th centuries. A pioneer in America, he has introduced recipes of antiquity and given them a fresh, new vitality: *branzino al sale*, which involves the Roman Empire method of baking fish in a sea salt crust; and *Colatura d'Alici*, another centuries-old dish that involves fermenting the juice of anchovies in a clay crock and mixing it with pasta.

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To remain faithful to his culinary roots, Antonio flies in 85 percent of his ingredients – fresh vegetables, cheeses and pastas – from the regions of Campania, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia and Sardinia each week. He personally selects and obtains the finest meats from New Zealand, New York State and Canada; and the finest fish and seafood – anchovies, John Dory fish, baby octopus -- from the Amalfi Coast, Israel and other areas. Using only fresh herbs in dishes, Antonio also prepares his own bread in brick ovens, as well as original pastas. Antonio is also insistent upon rotating sous chefs from Italy every year so that his kitchen remains faithful to classic southern Italian cuisine.

Antonio Bruno has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the “Chefs 2000” series for the years 1995-2000. He has been a featured guest chef at The James Beard Foundation; at the “Amore Culinary Classic” in Aspen; and the focal point of Gael Greene’s “Ask Gael” column in NEW YORK magazine for the historic dishes he has introduced to the American palate.

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