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RESTAURANT REPORT - Next Wave Italian

More Than a Restaurant, Del Posto Is the Shape Of Things To Come

By JENNIFER LEUZZI

One of the most anticipated openings in New York City this season is Del Posto (85 Tenth Ave. between 15th and 16th streets. 212-497-8090), the newest offering from Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich, and Lidia Bastianich with Chef Mark Ladner. It's too soon to tell if the elegant eatery will break Italian restaurants out of the three-star ghetto, but given the Batali-Bastianich record of starting trends, it probably will change everything from dining room service to the way chefs take out the trash.

At Del Posto, diners will see über-table-side service — and it all starts at the large dark wooden counter in the middle of the dining room.

“We call it the finishing table,” Mr. Bastianich said. That’s an understatement. The custom-built behemoth measures 10 feet by 3 1/2 feet and stands 3 feet tall. There are six built-in induction burners, a sink with running water, a salamander oven, and a hidden refrigerator, as well as drawers for garbage and storage. Unlike the usual carts on wheels careening through most dining rooms, its utilities require that it be anchored to the floor. It looks like a dark Molteni stove, with the salamander positioned off to one side in the center, exactly where the chimney would be.

The well-equipped table allows the wait staff to go beyond simple carving and serving. “There’s no precedent for this, so we’re just making it up as we go along,” Mr. Bastianich said. “The biggest challenge is the staff we needed to execute this doesn’t exist, but [staff] enthusiasm has not been a problem.”

With the average meal at Del Posto running about at three hours, even for à la carte, Mr. Ladner calls the table-side production “a self-defense mechanism.” There’s reverse traffic with plates going back into the kitchen because many dishes require additional preparation, so “the dining room service help takes the edge off, timing-wise.”

While the front of the house is soignée service, the back of the house is decidedly green: Del Posto is composting its kitchen scraps. All kitchen stations have multiple garbage containers: one for natural organic waste (excluding animal proteins like meat and bones); one for recyclables, and one for the rest. “It took almost a year to figure it out,” Mr. Ladner said. “And no one wanted to do it and there wasn’t much support.”

They finally found Action Carting Environmental Services in Newark, N.J., which makes daily pickups for everything. Eventually, Mr. Ladner hopes to trade the compost for greens with Nancy MacNamara of Honey Locust Farms in the Hudson Valley.

In addition to composting, Del Posto is using environment-friendly cleaning products, recycled paper goods, sustainable and traceable ingredients, and Ever Pure water filters on all the faucets, including the washing and prep stations. “It’s kind of a hobby of mine,” Mr. Ladner said.

Mr. Bastianich admits he’s not really the green type, but he believes it’s the business model of the future: “Look at the evolution of the green market in the past 20 years: This is the same thing.”