



Fifty Years Of Accademia Italiana della Cucina in NY. Evergreen Authenticity in the City

Marina Melchionda (February 15, 2010)



On February 9 the Accademia Italiana della Cucina celebrated the 50th Anniversary of its New York Delegation. President Giovanni Ballarini and Delegate Francesca Baldeschi Balleani honored ten fellow Italians and those businesses who throughout the years have been outstanding in spreading and promoting Italian cuisine in NY. The Italian Trade Commission, directed by Mr. Aniello Musella, in collaboration with the Italian Government Tourism Board/North America, directed by Mr. Riccardo Strano sponsored the sumptuous dinner, held at the Metropolitan Club.

On February 9 the [Accademia Italiana della Cucina](#) [2], celebrated the 50th Anniversary of its New York delegation in one of the most exclusive venues of the city, the [Metropolitan Club](#) [3]. All of us



guests were warmly welcomed in the Club's hall where we could enjoy an exquisite cocktail hour featuring delicacies prepared with authentic Italian products. As the bells rang, elegant gentlemen in black tie accompanied ladies in long dresses into the shiny dining room, where tables covered with satin table cloths were waiting for them to be seated.

The memorable event, organized with the support of the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [4], directed by Mr. Aniello Musella, and the [Italian Government Tourism Board/North America](#) [5], directed by Dr. Riccardo Strano, enjoyed the sponsorship of well-known Italian labels such as [Ferrero SpA](#) [6].; [Monte Schiavo Vini](#) [7]; [Toma Industria Abbigliamento Professionale](#) [8]; [Velenosi Vini](#) [9]; [Umani Ronchi](#) [10]; [Vigne Di Leo](#) [11]; [Sferiterio Opera Festival](#) [12]; [Garofoli](#) [13]; [Varnelli](#) [14]; [Cartechini](#) [15].

The most eminent representatives of the Italian Community in New York were present to join the President of the Accademia Giovanni Ballarini and the Director of the New York Delegation Francesca Baldeschi Balleani in celebrating this important milestone for the oldest foreign branch of the Institution.

Diplomats, journalists, businessmen and "Accademici" - those entitled to be members of the Accademia for their renowned expertise in the field or for their outstanding contribution to the preservation and spread of the Italian Culinary tradition - found their table in the sumptuous dining room decorated with golden stuccos and crystal chandeliers. Among them, the Consul General of Italy in New York Francesco Maria Talò with his wife Ornella, the Deputy Consul Marco Alberti; Federal Judge Dominic Massaro; President of CINN Group, Inc. Steve Acunto; President and CEO of [Fiat New York](#) [16] Gianfranco Cuda; and many others.

A special guest at the event was the delegation of the [Province of Macerata](#) [17], led by its President Franco Capponi, accompanied by the director of the Italian Government Tourism Board/North America Mr. Riccardo Strano. The delegation is in New York to present the beauties of the Marche region and this Medieval town to the American public.

Their famous chef Lucio Pompili from the ["Symposium" restaurant](#) [18] in Serrauengarina (Province of Pesaro) prepared the sophisticated dinner for all of us. It was a perfect blend of the best of Italian tradition and some of the most modern techniques and trends now spreading throughout Italy.

As we were served the Appetizer, Parmenter con uovo fritto al tartufo nero d'inverno - (Parmenter with fried egg flavored with black winter truffle) - the ceremony started with the intonation of the two National anthems, the Italian and the American one, and the introductory remarks of Mr. Ballarini and Mrs. Balleani, both visibly moved. "I am not usually emotional, but in this case I just can't avoid it. The Academy represents not only a job to me, but a personal mission. As I continue directing the New York branch and see how Italians who immigrated to this country are becoming more and more committed to the preservation of our cuisine, I feel ever more proud to serve such a cause", started Mrs. Balleani, as tears filled her eyes.

"I came right from Italy just to celebrate this special occasion", continued Mr. Ballarini, President of the Accademia. "I believe in the particular relevance of the New York delegation for the purposes of our mission. It is particularly important for us, indeed, to protect our traditional cuisine from the growth of the globalized fast-food market in this country. Without a doubt, New York is the right city to start working on this particular issue".

A strenuous defender of the authenticity of Italian products and recipes, President Ballarini is also famous for his book *Il falso in tavola - Una mistificazione da conoscere e contrastare* (Fakes at the table - A mystification to know and contrast), published by the Accademia Italiana in 2009. Dedicated to the promotion of the "Made in Italy" against counterfeiting, it is only one of the President's personal initiatives towards a wider spread of the "Italian food culture both in Italy and the world".



As he told us during the Cocktail Hour preceding the Dinner, in fact, he is personally responsible for the upcoming publication of an online magazine on the website of the Accademia. "Visitors will be invited to read the latest about Italian cuisine, information on Italian products, and learn more about our centenary tradition. We at the Accademia know that Internet has become the most effective media to communicate -especially with the new generations. We have to look at the future if we want our tradition to remain alive. We have to look at them".

It was the Consul General Francesco Maria Talò that stepped on the podium to further underline the role of the Accademia as a cultural institution, both in the world and in the United States. "Italy has a remarkable fame in this country for a number of fields in which it excels. Among them, there is of course the culinary one. The only way, or at least the main one, by which we can keep this primate is to educate people about the importance of a healthy, responsible, genuine diet. The Accademia is here in New York, and in another dozen cities throughout the United States, to accomplish this goal. Its tasks are in constant evolution, just as Italian cuisine is transforming, but it, as an institution, remains a tenet for all of those who dedicate their efforts to the spread of the Italian culinary culture".

The link between past and future that the Accademia represents was symbolized very well by the first course we were served. The Pasta artigianale Marchigiana con Beccaccino pettinata di caffè e cacao, riduzione a goccia di lacrima di Morro d'Alba was brought to us in a jar that we were asked to "shake" just as you would do with a cocktail. A layer of tomato sauce, one of heavy cream, one of green beans and bacon, were topped with a sort of Tubettoni. Mixed together and poured in the plate, they became a traditional, fully Italian Piatto di Pasta.

As we were served the second course, Tagliata di lombo con olio di rosmarino e bandiera di verdure (flank steak with Rosemary-flavored olive oil with a side of vegetables), Italian singer [Giada Valenti](#) [19] intoned famous Italian and Italian-American pieces accompanied by her Orchestra. Among them, "Quando" and "Caruso" perfectly matched the strong and at the same time delicate flavor of the dishes we were served, making all of us feel as if we had been brought back to Italy for an evening.

Awards were presented during dessert. "This is not something that the Academia usually does, but we feel it is appropriate to recognize the efforts of some of our co-citizens in promoting our cuisine in such as an important occasion as the 50th anniversary of the New York delegation", said Mr. Ballarini calling one by one all the honorees onto the podium. Ten recognitions were awarded to ten businesses and/or personalities who were considered to be outstanding in promoting Italian products and cuisine in New York: Restaurant Owners Laura Maloglio ([Barbetta 1906](#) [20]), Iacopo Falai ([Falai](#) [21]), Michele e Salvatore Doria (Gino 1945), Sirio Maccioni ([Le Cirque](#) [22]), Gianfranco Sorrentino ([Il Gattopardo](#) [23]); Journalists Pamela Fiori, Mimmi Sheraton, and Luisianna Messeri; Writer [Giuliano Bugialli](#) [24]; and Grocer Lou di Palo from [Di Palo Italian Grocery Store](#) [25] in Little Italy.

Coffee was served with a very special dessert dedicated to Delegate Francesca Baldeschi Balleani, Carota sottoterra dolce-salato (Underground sweet and sour carrot), a pastry covered with orange glaze and shaped as a carrot accompanied by cocoa powder.

A drop of exquisite Anice liquor from the Marche Region finally warmed all of us up, as we were getting ready to end our Italian evening and step out in the freezing New York night.

The Accademia is the sole Italian institution who, for more than fifty years, is dedicated to fighting for the pre-eminence of gastronomic culture over the depressing commercialization of food and all forms of ignorance about it.

In 2003, the Minister for Cultural Affairs recognized the well documented cultural merits of the Accademia by granting it the denomination, "Cultural Institution", thus placing it amongst the largest



and most important Italian cultural organizations, often laden with over a century of experience, rich in past and present glories, bearers of experience and wisdom in the cultural arena.

Until today, the Accademia's intense and qualified efforts have engendered an ever growing sensibility among bodies of information and public opinion towards the themes connected with safeguarding the values of the civilization of the Italian table, and of that patrimony of history, culture and custom, which has been taking shape over time in every part of Italy, also because of a specific philosophy of taste.

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