

The Leopard at des Artistes, Meals and Wines with a Story

Claire Moccia (December 17, 2015)



The Hotel des Artistes, now a luxurious apartment complex, has long been among New York City's most illustrious buildings. Its major attraction, however, is the restaurant it hosts, which has passed through the hands of many owners since it first opened in the 1920s.

Gianfranco Sorrentino was born in Naples and has been working in the restaurant industry for the past 46 years, starting his first job in Capri when he was 14. Since then he has gained international experience working in Italy, England, Spain, Japan, and in New York.

Sorrentino opened his first restaurant - Neapolitan of course - in 1991 inside the Museum of Modern Art, surrounded by masterpieces. He soon moved across the street and opened another restaurant



called [Il Gattopardo](#) [2]. This then moved a few doors over, into a former residence of the Rockefellers, and which is said to have been connected to the Museum through a secret tunnel.

The previous location is now home to another of Sorrentino's restaurants, [Mozzarella & Vino](#) [3], a simpler restaurant whose main feature is the high quality of its products.

A fascinating location

The same care goes into selecting the products used at The Leopard, which opened four years ago in another interesting space: the old Hotel des Artistes on the Upper West Side, now a luxurious condominium. In the Hotel des Artistes, the Café des Artistes was initially a standard hotel restaurant.

But its walls featured murals by Howard Chandler Christy that depicted naked women, and which caused a great scandal among the elites of 1924. Then in 1960, a new owner, George Lang, a famous violin player, turned into one of the world's most famous restaurants, hosting the likes of Queen Elizabeth and Winston Churchill. Lang closed the Café des Artistes in 2009.

In 2011, Sorrentino took over and after extensive restorations turned the space into a southern Italian restaurant under executive chef [Vito Gnazzo](#) [4]. The Leopard now has a new chef, [Michele Brogioni](#) [5], who has worked in Tuscany (where he earned a Michelin star), Moscow, and New York.

Brogioni has been modifying [The Leopard](#) [5]'s menu, which he varies seasonally, always prioritizing the freshness of the ingredients. There's also great value placed on providing guests with authentic culinary experiences. This is especially true when it comes to holidays. "At Christmas and Easter, for instance, we try to serve our tradition, our culture to our clientele," Sorrentino explains.

Wine with a story

Last but not least, there's the wine. Sorrentino and his team go to Italy two or three times a year to select the wines, focusing on artisanal producers. They like to meet and talk with winemakers personally.

"We want the wine to tell a story, so when we pour a wine, we can tell the customer where it's from, its tradition" he says. All this care and attention to detail just adds to the restaurant's distinctive quality. Every aspect of The Leopard has a story: the location, the owner, the chef, the food, the wine, and the customers. Coming here is not just about having a delicious meal, it's a complete experience.

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