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Il Grano: Ready for Prime Time—Again

Chef-Owner Salvatore Marino steps back into the limelight with a newly appointed space.

West Los Angeles, California (January 2008) – Il Grano has long been a neighborhood gem. This intimate space, tucked into a bustling stretch of Santa Monica Boulevard in West Los Angeles, has been a culinary oasis since its opening in 1997. Chef and Owner Salvatore Marino brings excitement to the world of authentic Italian cooking with his seasonal, contemporary fare, including his signature *crudo*, the Italian-style raw fish that dazzles food critics and guests alike.

Market-Fresh Contemporary Italian

In the kitchen, Marino shares the same culinary devotion to both earth and sea. Remaining faithful to his Neapolitan roots, he serves the freshest seafood, dutifully rising each morning before dawn—rain or shine—to find the best catches at the local fish markets. His seafood specialties include homemade Squid Ink Bigoli Pasta with Cuttle Fish and Sea Urchin Sauce; Skate Wing over Venus Black Risotto; or Gnocchi with Clams.

Marino was featured in the *Los Angeles Times* for being the only chef in Los Angeles preparing *Fantasia di Crudo*, a signature dish since the earliest days of the restaurant. This Italian-style raw fish features mostly wild line-caught fish, changes on a daily basis depending on what is freshest at the market—maybe octopus, wild Japanese snapper or wild Japanese striped bass—and is served with a variety of accompaniments in artistic presentations. In April 2006 The Wine Spectator's Top Italian Restaurants in the USA lists Il Grano.

Marino also makes regular trips to local farmers' markets and grows his own tomatoes and herbs to accent his contemporary Italian dishes with the absolute freshest flavors. These creations come to life in the chef's nightly tasting menus consisting of either five or eight courses. Every nuance of the ingredients can be

enjoyed in dishes such as Artisanal Pasta with Lamb Breast Ragout Sauce; Grilled Tenderloin with Mashed Potatoes and Port-Gorgonzola Sauce; table-side served Pork Shank for two Osso Buco style over Risotto.

Along with various à la carte lunch selections, Marino presents two different set three-course business lunch menus, served between 11:30 and 2:30 pm. Depending on the guest's choice, they might enjoy a homemade ravioli or gnocchi or market-fresh fish along with a soup, salad or a miniature *crudo* or tartar, depending on the season and dessert.

An Exceptional Wine Program

Always playing the consummate host, Salvatore Marino often dashes from kitchen to the front of the house to chat for a moment with longtime regulars, and perhaps sharing some wine (a real passion) from his 800+ bottle *Wine Spectator* award-winning list.

Il Grano was the first restaurant in the country in 2005 to feature the most technologically advanced wine cuvinet system, the Enomatic. This state-of-the-art device holds eight refrigerated bottles and eight at room temperature, and is programmed for three pour levels (taste, half-glass, and full-glass). This allows guests to enjoy the finest of wines poured especially for the evening's menu.

Marino continue to explore the diverse wine regions of Italy with major enthusiasm and feature their discoveries on the notable wine list. There is also an impressive selection of German and Austrian Rieslings dating back to 1971 that might just steal the show. An exciting showcase of Terrabianca wines from the family vineyards of Marino's wife, Maja, lends extra prestige to Il Grano's wine program. As an added bonus, many of the more affordable bottles on the list are also available next door at **La Bottega Marino**, Salvatore's charming gourmet deli, whose deliciously prepared sandwiches landed a cover of Bon Appetit Magazine in Aug 2007. (A sister property is located on Larchmont Boulevard in Los Angeles.)

A New Look

The 60-seat restaurant was entirely redesigned by Osvaldo Maiozzi in 2005 to brighten the space and create more of an intimate ambiance. White walls are offset by polished dark hard-wood floors; custom-made

chairs and high-backed booths feature dark wood and the softest leather in creamy-apricot tones. The imported chandeliers and wall sconces add warm lighting while the eye-catching art deco ceiling fixture, custom-made from Italian stucco, brings texture and depth to the room.

There is also a bar area with a marble-topped bar and two-seater bar stools where guests can relax with a glass of the ever-changing and eclectic wine-by-the-glass program or a cocktail before dinner. Adjacent to the bar, the private dining room is cozy, with seating for ten, and rimmed with framed black-and-white photographs of Italy. The whole restaurant is brought to life with fresh flowers, chosen and arranged personally by Marino.

The Marino Legacy Continues to Grow

The Marino family has been a part of Los Angeles restaurant lore for over 50 years since Salvatore's father, **Ciro Marino**, was part of the popular Frank Sinatra hangout Villa Capri in Hollywood. Through the decades, the Marinos have also thrived at the Martoni, the Sunset Marquis on Sunset, and Marino's—still open and thriving in Hollywood and managed by his brother Mario.

Salvatore Marino's quest for pureness of flavors led him back to native Italy, where he trained at two Michelin favorites, the three-star Gualtiero Marchesi and two-star Tornaavento. Working in those restaurants taught him the enduring importance of *materie prime* or "top ingredients."

Marino returned to Los Angeles and opened Il Grano in 1997. He also opened La Bottega Marino, a value-priced Italian deli restaurant right next door, and both establishments have received raves from such publications as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, *Angeleno Magazine* and *The Wine Spectator*. 2008 has added to the list of recognition a coveted James Beard nomination for Best Chef.

***Il Grano** and **La Bottega Marino** are located at 11359 Santa Monica Boulevard in West Los Angeles. The restaurant is open for lunch daily from 11:30 to 2:30 pm; and for dinner, Monday through Saturday, 5:30 pm to 10:00 pm. All major credit cards are accepted. Parking is available on the street or in the metered lot on Purdue Street. Reservations are recommended; please telephone 310.477.7886. For more information, please visit www.ilgrano.com.*

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