



April/ May 2001 article by Henrik Oldenburg (Translation by Pelle Zandèn)

For many years in this location there was a Mexican restaurant that we never wanted to visit, but in 1998 it all changed. The reason was the arrival of a young, ambitious and good chef. Giuliano Brenna had come back from cooking adventures in Milan and in the US and remade the Mexican place to a modern, Roman restaurant with a clear influence from the world outside Rome.

Excellent local raw material and rustic food gives room for joyous play with fresh ingredients, with spices and with taste, so the result on the plate looks very un-Roman, even if it is just the degree of imagination that is different. Giuliano Brenna has won the hearts of demanding local gourmets despite the somewhat remote location of the restaurant. You had better reserve a table.

There is a menu with the suggestions of the day that vary from time to time, but you can very well stick to the "fixed" menu that has 4 antipasti (Lire 16-20,000), 5 primi (Lire 15-17,000) and 4 contorni (Lire 12,000), besides a special additional cheese menu with local products (Lire 14,000) and various desserts and also a special menu for grappa, liqueurs etc.

You do not have to read many lines on the menu before you discover that this is different from traditional Roman restaurants. What else is there to say about an entrée such as "Quail (the little bird) with endives and olives" (Lire 20,000) or Storione affumicato al finocchio e ginepro (Lire 20,000), or our seasonal favourite: Carciofo ripieno al Gorgonzola (Lire 16,000), where four half, slightly cooked and slightly grilled artichokes are served with stirred gorgonzola and small cubes of red beets? Decorated with lettuce and a little mustard and probably some other imaginative and delicious ingredients.

Among the pasta dishes you will find some exciting things with chicken liver and coda di rospo, apart from Ravioli di Faraone al Tartufo nero (Lire 17,000), elegant, home made pasta filled with pearl hen and covered with fine slices of truffle and chopped tomato in a light oil. Simple (!) and well tasting.

Among the main courses fantasy is also in play. For instance Coniglio al Carciofi, purea d'aglio e curry (Lire 29,000), filet of rabbit minced with chopped garlic and spiced with fine/mild curry, served in a tight sauce. In addition you will get a slightly grilled artichoke. A delicious and creative course.

Or what about the Chinese inspired Petto d'A natra al mandarino e tè verde (Lire 29,000)? Yes, it is actually green tea that comes with a sliced/split cooked lightly slightly red duck breast, slices of mandarins and served with a pointy mandarin sauce, it leads your thoughts to something so un-Roman. It is a great, well tasting creative dish, where to the best of our ability we were looking for the tea, but we are not sure that we found it.

The wine list is heavy and impressive, packaged like the Popes' daily commandments for the last 300 years. Particularly the white wines are mostly modern wines stored in barriques. Wood is the buzz word, the pricing and geographical spread are custom oriented and there are numerous small producers represented. The prices range from Lire 20,000 to 87,000 but there are some real opportunities around Lire 25-35,000.

There are even more possibilities with a range from Lire 20,000 to 340,000 (Sassaicaia, 1997) and Fratta Maculan IGT from Veneto, 1998 for the same price. Once again, there are many good choices between Lire 30,000 and 35,000.

Common sense and fantasy reign here. The service is gentle and quick and if Giuliano Brenna does not take to the road again, it will be very exciting to follow the development of this nice little restaurant in the back streets of Trastevere. The bill for two people who ate three courses each, shared a cheese, drank two really nice bottles of wine (Cervaro della Sale from Umbria and Taurasi from Campania) and finished off with a grappa, including water, bread and service was 1,000 Danish Crowns.