

JAY WESTON'S

restaurant newsletter

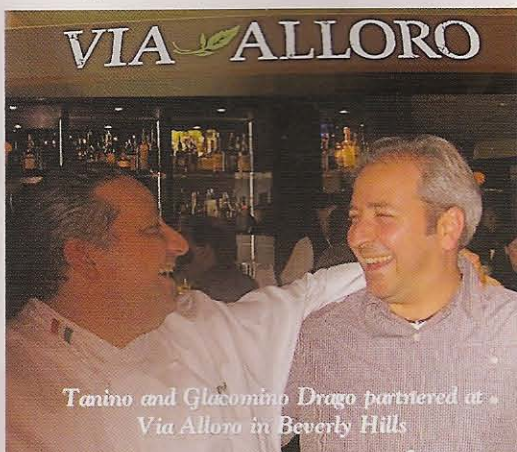


The insider's guide to the dining scene of Los Angeles . . . and the World

What makes one new restaurant successful and many others fail? If I knew the answer, I would not be a restaurant critic but rather a restaurant mogul. But my friend Jonathan Gold recently said that an essential element of a successful new restaurant is 'happiness'. When diners come, they want to experience the buzz

VIA ALLORO

Two Drago Brothers Open Italian Seafood in Beverly Hills!



Tanino and Giacomino Drago partnered at Via Alloro in Beverly Hills

of excitement and 'joy' engendered by discovering a new eating adventure. Which is one of many reasons why I suspect that VIA ALLORO (301 N. Canon Drive, northwest corner at Dayton, Beverly Hills (310) 275-2900) is destined



for a long, happy life. The fact that it is the latest offspring of two of the legendary Drago brothers, Giacomino and Tanino, is but one part of the equation. They have taken a loca-

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Chef's Special Beef Filet at Hop Woo



Delicious, Authentic Chinese Food on L.A.'s Westside!

Legendary Chinese film director John Woo is a noted gourmet, so when several readers called to tell me that they had spotted him eating both lunch and dinner several days in a row at my

favorite little Chinese restaurant, HOP WOO BBQ & SEAFOOD (11110 W. Olympic Blvd., West L.A. on the southwest corner of Olympic and Sepulveda, at the rear of a tiny strip mall and behind its companion BBQ take out shop; no valet parking but you will easily find a space in the evening, (310) 575-3668), I was intrigued enough to make a return visit...and was blown away by the exciting changes I found. Whether it is possible to get great Chinese food on the Westside of Los Angeles has always been questionable. For the past decade, this little restaurant has been valiantly trying, but the lack of a top chef was always the limiting factor. These food 'artists'

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Ventura Limoncello Originale

La Dolce Vita's Drink!

When I was young(er), I spent a lot of time on the Amalfi coast of Italy, from Sorrento to Capri. Which is a pretty heavenly place to spend time. And I remember with intense pleasure the genial habit of every restaurant there...serving a chilled glass of *limoncello* as a cool *coda* at the end of every meal. The tart, sweet mellow flavor of this lemon liqueur has stayed with me over the years, but the various brands which I tried here didn't seem to match my memories. Danny DeVito recently came out with his own brand, admitting to *The View* audience that he had overindulged on it with George Clooney the previous evening, but I did not particularly like the overly-sweet version he offered. Then, someone sent me a bottle made by a young couple, James and Manuela Zaretti-Carling, in their Ventura County venue, a spirit which won the gold medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition...and yes, this was the drink of my memory. **Ventura Limoncello Originale** is made from Ventura County sweet, fragrant lemons picked at their height of ripeness, when the fruit's oils and sugars are fully developed, from a recipe of Rome-born Manuela's grandmother (nonna). For ten years it was a Ventura family-only treasure, but at the urging of family and friends they finally began commercial production...and it is now in more than 100 California



Manuela and James

restaurants and liquor stores. The best limoncellos are far greater than the seeming simplicity of their parts: lemon zest, sugar, water and alcohol. The ingredients and their handling, the proportions in which they are combined, and the length of infusion time all determine the quality and taste of the final product. The fruit is meticulously hand-peeled by Manuela and her team, and not even

the tiniest bit of bitter pith escapes their eyes. The maceration is a secret process, but what results is a sweet, tart and supremely smooth spirit with a beautiful sunny color. No dyes, synthetic flavorings or preservatives ever. I keep it in my freezer and use it for several specialty cocktails as well as drinking it straight. (And last night I added a few drops to a grilled fish dish for a wonderful flavor.) I am told that a decadent second version, *Limoncello Crema* (creamy) will be available shortly. It sells for about \$25 and is worth every penny. You can go to www.venturalimoncello.com for more info. Ciao.

