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PAOLA BOTTERO

From the Center of Rome to the Center of the Plate

If you were born and raised in the historic and popular Quartiere Flaminio neighborhood in Rome, many would never leave. But Paola Bottero has led a life full of surprises, where time and again “why not” took precedence over “why”, leading to a career of interesting turns and achievement where all roads eventually led away from Rome.

Summoned by their father Alessandro Bottero, a violin virtuoso playing with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York in the 1960's, the family left Italy to be reunited in New York, settling near Columbia University. As her father went on to play with Zubin Mehta in the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Paola stayed in New York and became a translator and worked at the Italian Trade Commission. But it was her two brothers' involvement in the Restaurant Industry that provided her eventual calling, as her younger brothers' wild success opening 65 Irving Place in downtown New York provided the family with a template for culinary achievement. Seeing the likes of Andy Warhol and Paul Newman as his customers nightly, she said “Why not?” again, rolled up her sleeves, and went to work for another well known Roman family, the Lattanzis, who at the time had the only 3 star Italian Restaurant in New York as awarded by Mimi Sheraton. They trained her, befriended her, and eventually backed her.

At the age of 36, Paola Bottero, mother of 2 young sons, opened Paola's on Manhattan's Upper East Side in 1983. By providing a welcoming, authentic home for Italian Cuisine, incorporating the classic dishes from Rome and resisting the trendy, Paola earned 2 stars of her own from the New York Times 14 years later on Valentine's Day in 1997. On the most challenging day to be judged, Ruth Reichel said, “Everybody in New York seems to be looking for the perfect neighborhood restaurant. I think I found it.” – It was love, indeed.



Opportunities followed, including the chance at a bigger space in the Wales Hotel just a few blocks north, embedded within the iconic neighborhood of Carnegie Hill, and owned by one of her customers. Large windows, a space flush with sunlight, a party room upstairs and a rooftop terrace overlooking Central Park provided ample opportunity to grow yet again. This spot, Paola's current location at 92nd and Madison, placed her in the middle of what would become her extended family, her current clientele. "Having the opportunity to serve the generations of families who come in together for dining moments is my greatest gift yet," Paola emphasizes time and again.

But there are many gifts. Working with her son Stefano, being across the street from her granddaughter's school and living near her eldest son and all her grandchildren make the work mesh with family so beautifully. And, when a few extra minutes bubble up, she can sneak away and indulge her passions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Metropolitan Opera House. Her brothers are both nearby, one of whom is the Executive Chef for Cuisinart – Waring and the other a restaurateur in the Hamptons with his sons. They gather, talk shop, and remember Rome where the old neighborhood has recently been revitalized with the new Maxxi Museum and the Auditorium Music Center, home to the Rome Symphony. Alessandro Bottero would be quite proud of the new Rome, and even more so where the roads from there have led his daughter. As Paola's approaches a 30 year anniversary, there will certainly be reason to celebrate. Why not, once more.

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Photos & Video Available

For more information:

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