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Daily Dish

The inside scoop on food in Los Angeles

10 great Italian restaurants

Spaghetti Rustichella with sea urchin, squid ink bottarga, garlic, Calabrian chilies and breadcrumbs at Bestia. (Seirra Prescott /)

By **JONATHAN GOLD**

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Los Angeles has never been rich in the sort of red-sauce Italian restaurants so common on the other coast, but it has always been notable for the other kind: restaurants in which Italian cooking and the idea of fine dining were not incompatible. It could be argued that the culture of New York's expense-account Italian kitchens began with Romeo Salta's Chianti here in the 1930s, that Perino's led the way for luxury Italian style in the 1960s and that Rex and Valentino established U.S. *alta cucina* in the 1970s. And the cultural tradition has never faltered: These days, in some parts of town, you're never more than a few blocks from a temperature-controlled pasta lab or a plate of wood-roasted pigeon Here are 10 of the greats.

The Factory Kitchen - Angelo Auriana's restaurant is a compelling hybrid, an informal trattoria with rather formal northern Italian cooking. The dishes are composed and careful: sea robin roasted with olives and cherry tomatoes, pancotto with fried duck eggs, and complex *casonzei* pasta with browned butter and sage. *Focaccina di Recco* is a marvelous thing, a kind of crisp, translucent Genoese version of a Lebanese *borek* stuffed with herbs and milky Crescenza cheese. *1300 Factory Place, Los Angeles, (213) 996-6000,* *thefactorykitchen.com.*

Maccheroni Republic - Maccheroni Republic is the project of Antonio Tommasi and Jean-Louis de Mori, who ran Locanda Veneta, Ca' Brea and other fancy, well-regarded Italian restaurants and they were a fairly fancy crew. Evan Kleiman remembers Tommasi as the first chef in town to drive a Ferrari. Their restaurant is a delivery system for fried calamari and for Tommasi's supple, handmade pastas, for potato gnocchi in meat sauce or for a Venetian-style chicken soup so thick with shredded chicken that you could probably cut it with a knife. *332 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, (213) 346-9725.*

Mozzaplex - There's a magic in what some people call the Mozzaplex, the complex of three restaurants and a takeout counter overseen by Nancy Silverton with Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich. The cooking, whether the puffy pies at Pizzeria Mozza, the perfected northern Italian dishes at Osteria Mozza, the charcuterie and grilled meats at Chi'Spacca or the focaccia at Mozza2Go, comes from an Italy of the mind, as if the corner of Highland and Melrose were its own *denominazione di origine controllata*. (Full disclosure: Silverton is a family friend. Feel free to ignore any of this.) *641 N. Highland Ave., L.A., (323) 297-0101,* *pizzeriamozza.com*

Sotto - Sotto is a different kind of Italian restaurant, a nominally southern Italian place dedicated to local produce and sustainable and artisanally produced meat, and a shrine to the awesome heat of its 15,000-pound oven. You can get the hot, fresh bread with headcheese or puréed lardo instead of olive oil; clams cooked with fresh shell beans and the awesomely spicy Calabrian sausage *'nduja*; or a Sunday-only porchetta practically radioactive with fennel and garlic. Chefs Steve Samson and Zach Pollack may be *pizzaioli* in public, and the wood-oven pizza is pretty good, but they really seem to be abbatoir jocks instead. *9575 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, (310) 277-0210,* *sottorestaurant.com.*

Vincenti - Brentwood must be the world capital of a certain kind of Italian restaurant, the kind with carpaccio, tricolor salads and three kinds of pasta with vegetables, chicken under a brick and tiramisu. Brentwood is also where you will find Vincenti, which could pass as the go-to businessmen's restaurant in a large Italian city, with Nicola Mastronardi's superb roasted meats, pastas made with house-cured *guanciale* and the grilled cuttlefish salad against which all others are measured. *11930 San Vicente Blvd., Brentwood, (310) 207-0127,* *vincentiristorante.com.*