

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

I first met **Salvatore De Riso** in September 2010 at his bakery in Tramonti during the cultural festival “Scala Meets New York” still organized annually by native-son **Padre Enzo Fortunato**, a prolific writer and the Press Director for the Franciscan Order in Assisi. This year I met him again at his bistro in his hometown of Minori, like Scala on the Amalfi Coast. I’d been invited there to cover another cultural festival, Gustaminori, which “Sal” was instrumental in founding some 25 years ago.

Sal was born on November 28, 1966, into a family of “foodies.” In 1908, his great aunt, **Carolina Florio**, had opened a bar/tobacco shop, which served homemade *granite di limone*. It became the family business. So in 1980, Sal enrolled in Salerno’s hotel management school and immediately started working as a chef in prestigious hotels on the Amalfi Coast: Hotel San Pietro, Hotel Palumbo, and Hotel Caruso in Ravello.

He especially liked making desserts.

After seven years he stopped working in hotels to concentrate on sweets. While an apprentice, his mentor chocolatier **Iginio Massari** in Brescia taught him how to make visibly mouth-watering cakes and how to run a business.

In 1989, Sal returned to Minori and opened a tiny pastry laboratory because he could hook it up to his father’s bar, making sweets to accompany his father’s homemade ice creams and *granite*.

“My first creation was a *profiterole al limone*,” he told me. “A French/northern Italian favorite with a southern flavor.

“From then on I was considered an innovator, especially after I appeared as a regular guest on **Antonella Clerici**’s TV program *La Prova del Cuoco*.

“Even if here in the south,” he continued, “we have some delicious traditional sweets, I was the first to introduce mousses, cakes topped with fresh ‘exotic’ fruits, but I also have always had a deep respect for Campania’s local ingredients: hazelnuts from Griffoni, ricotta from Tramonti, white figs from the Cilento, apricots from Mount Vesuvius, and, of course, lemons from Minori. In short: my innovations have also brought out the best in the culinary traditions of my home territory.”

ITALY’S BEST
PASTRY CHEF!
SALVATORE DE RISO



Now besides the ice creams and some 95 different sweets he sells at his bistro/pastry shop in Minori, Sal has a shop in Rome at Via Santa Costanza 29-31, and as of last year one in Milan’s *Galleria*.

Except for his perishable *torte al forno*, liqueurs, perfumes, and very recently bathing suits and scarves with a lemon theme can be purchased and delivered worldwide by DHL from the shop on his website: www.salderiso.it.

Otherwise, Sal works through distributors. He makes his products from Monday through Thursday in Tramonti, where he employs 65 people: office workers, accountants, PR, packagers, truck drivers, tasters and chefs, and ships them every Friday in trucks refrigerated at -18° C. Deliveries in Italy and elsewhere in Europe: Germany, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands are on Saturdays.

Outside Europe, Sal’s distributors are in Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada, mainly in Ontario and Quebec. Since last year, his distributors in New York are **Domenico** and **Antonio Magliulo**, the owners of “Buon Italia,” who sell his products at the Chelsea Market, and to the restaurants *Sandro’s*, *San Matteo* and *Celeste*, all in Manhattan.

Sal’s bestsellers as well, as his personal favorites, are his *Delizia al limone* made with white chocolate icing and *limoncello*, his pear and ricotta cake, and his *panettone* Milanese.

“I make around 2,000 *panettone* a day in Tramonti, not in Milan. I have to call it Milanese because the original recipe for *panettone* was born in Milan. It’s artisanal and made with flour leavened with mother yeast, butter, eggs, Australian raisins, almonds from Bari or Avola in Sicily, homemade candied orange peel and candied lime peel from Calabria. We make it according to the recipe in the Ministerial Decree of July 2005, which clearly states the amounts of each ingredient. It’s a Christmas tradition, but we make it year-round.”

Over his long career, Sal has received numerous awards; most recently in 2019 he was voted “The King of *Panettone*” and “Best Italian Pastry Chef of the Year.” Nevertheless, the two highlights of his career were giving **Saint John Paul II** his chocolate and mandarin Jubilee cake “*Oro Puro*” and, last year, his *panettone Milanese* to **Pope Francis** for his birthday on December 17.○

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: DELIZIA AL LIMONE WITH CERTIFIED LEMONS FROM MINORI; RICOTTA AND PEAR CAKE; SALVATORE DE RISO; SAL’S “LEMON BIKINI”; SAL’S “LEMON SCARF”

