



HEINZ BECK

by Lucy Gordan | Food, Food blog

My first interviews with Heinz Beck were published in La Madia Travelfood and www.epicurean-traveler.com in 2003.



When did you decide to renovate “La Pergola”?

In 2014 we interviewed 10 architects who presented their projects. Most of them were Italian and they all had impressive c.v.s. There were only two foreigners.

In 2019 we met with Jouin and Manku for the first time and after less than six months we’d agreed on the first plans for our first room and had decided on the color schemes and the atmosphere for the entire “new” “La Pergola”. Attention to detail creates true exclusivity so everything you see here was designed specifically and exclusively for the new “La Pergola”. You won’t find anything here anywhere else.

Why did you choose Manku?

Because we soon developed a special understanding and very important rapport. We talked a lot. I listened to him and he to me. Only if there's a deep understanding and strong interpersonal respect, can you create a great project. "La Pergola" was closed for seven months, but the project started five years ago.

What's the inspiration behind this renovation?

Since we are above Rome's rooftops, our walls are the color of terracotta, because traditionally the roof tiles of Rome were made of terracotta. The darker the sky becomes, the redder becomes the ambience of "La Pergola", like during Rome's summer sunsets. At the beginning of the ceilings, we installed billowing sails, that slowly, slowly become clouds and disappear to create a sense of peace. Our chandeliers are "candles", blown by hand one-by-one. The bubbles inside each of them represent lightly-falling rain. The wall tapestries depict flowers designed by me and then embroidered in silk by a workshop in Paris. These floral designs by me have been reproduced on our plates and tablecloths and napkins. We've created much more transparency and light in the "new" "La Pergola". There's no obstacle anymore between us and Rome. Now we see all of Rome from above. The restaurant radiates the harmony found in nature: a harmony of well being and of peace, where you feel wrapped in beauty.



You've described the changes in the "La Pergola"'s appearance; what about the changes in its

menu?

You've known me for almost thirty years. You know that my cuisine has changed many times during these years. I changed to introduce new dishes, but one thing must never change: the healthiness of my menu. Healthiness and balance are essential in my dishes. Ideas and inspiration, techniques, and products and ingredients change, but the healthiness, a beautiful presentation, and the various tastes of my ingredients must always be perceptible. Perfect service is also a fundamental must. My staff must notice a guest's possible uneasiness and foresee his or her requests before the guest does. That's a top requirement for excellent service.

A person goes to a restaurant to relax. If he or she is stressed out because of work, he or she doesn't want to get more stressed out, so a restaurant must offer a welcoming, invisible but attentive service, which gives the guest blissful comfort.

You wanted to be a painter and for "La Pergola"'s new look you designed its wall tapestries, its plates, its tablecloths, and napkins, but you also kept some of its original paintings which belong to the Hilton?

Yes, we kept four paintings for continuity. Two are in the "Smoking Room" because they're reminders of a time when people smoked. The other two are by Rapous; they depict vases with flowers. Near them, in a glass case on the wall are 17 Gallé vases of the 34 once displayed. We kept those which mirror our new color scheme.

Did you renovate your kitchen equipment too?

I added a Basque Jospier grill and a Jospier oven.

Which of your previous successes are still on your menu?

Only two: zucchini flowers served on a sauce of crustaceans, saffron and caviar and "fagotelli 'La Pergola'".

Which of your dishes is your favorite?

There are so many that it would be impossible to choose one. My favorite dish is the one I'll create next.

Tell me about some of the dishes on your new menu?

"0.01" is a provocation. It stands for 0.01, the percentage of the world's biomass taken up by the human race. With this dish I wish to say that, even if we don't take care of many things because we're disorderly, nature takes over the space of everything that we humans leave round and about. This is a dangerous evil because we need to take care of our world and to preserve it. The ingredients of this dish are, tomato, basil, olive oil, and herbs. It's a completely vegan appetizer, with a minimal impact on the environment. It's served on a typically Roman cobblestone, which has begun to be covered with moss. This is to show that nature has begun

to reconquer its environment.



Agnello sull'Appia Antica

Your new “signature dish” is “Lamb on the Via Appia Antica”?

Yes.

The names of some of your new desserts?

We have added many new desserts. For example, “sweet Dreams” is pillow-shaped. It’s served on a real pillow instead of a plate. On top of the real pillow is another pillow made out of a type of dough called “streghe” or “witches”, except that this time it’s sweetened with almonds. The “streghe” pillow is filled with a chamomile custard, because chamomile brings sweet dreams. The custard is topped with tiny tomatoes called “Tomberries”, some of which are dried, some pickled and some fresh. They’re “dusted” with basil and a sauce of cascara and verbena. “Sweet Dreams” is not on the menu now because it’s a summer sweet. Instead, on the menu now, is a cream of ricotta and marzipan with a mouse of pistachio and a sorbet of candied orange. Other choices are “milk, cookies, and coffee” and a frozen pomegranate sphere on a cream of hazelnut chocolate with cannelloni made of salty pinenuts.



Which of your dishes have 0% waste?

All of them. We apply circular economy when we create our dishes. I don't like to create or to recuperate waste. So, I can't and don't create waste. If, when you create a new dish, you use every part of your raw materials, you don't create waste which is our objective. To give you an example, the pit and the peel of an avocado are reused to make compost.

You reopened in May and in November, when the new Michelin guide was published, you were yet again awarded three stars, how did your most loyal guests react to the changes in the layout and in your menu?

Everyone is very pleased. Everyone agrees that the restaurant's atmosphere is very different, but that it hasn't lost its gift of peace of mind. This positive reaction makes me very happy as does the confirmation of my three Michelin stars which I've had without interruption since 2005.

Green has always been your favorite color; don't you miss it?

I don't miss anything. Yes, the restaurant looks different, but it's so beautiful; has class and character. It's contemporary.

What percent of your guests are also guests of the hotel?

We know that 17% of our guests are staying at the Hilton and that another 60% are Italians. I don't know where the others come from.

During our first interview www.epicurean-traveler.com in 2003, you told me that you would never have other restaurants besides "La Pergola" because your place was here in front of the stove; then you changed and gradually opened restaurants in Oman, London, Japan, and Portugal. How many restaurants do you have now and where are they?

Now, outside of Italy I have only one restaurant, "Gusto by Heinz Beck", in the Conrad Algarve Hotel, in Almancil, Portugal. It's had one Michelin star since 2017. Today, the restaurants in addition to "La Pergola" run by B&M Consulting, the company I run with my wife Teresa, are: "Café Les Paillotes" in Pescara; "Ristorante Castello di Fighine" near Siena, which has had a Michelin star since 2014; and "St. George Restaurant by Heinz Beck" in the Ashbee Hotel in Taormina, which has had two Michelin stars since 2022; "Heinz Beck Restaurant" a Forte Village Resort in Santa Margherita di Pula in Sardinia; "Heinz Beck Food Line by Beck and Maltese Consulting for Palazzo Fiuggi in Fiuggi and "Ruliano with Heinz Beck" in Parma.

You're indefatigable; I've discovered that owning and running restaurants doesn't completely satisfy you, that you also collaborate in scientific research concerning nutrition and healthy food for a healthy life.

Yes, that's true. Since 2019 B&M Consulting, in collaboration with UniPegaso, inaugurated in Naples, the first university dedicated to gastronomy and turismo, where I'm the "scientific director". I also collaborate with nutritional research projects at the Tor Vergata, branch of the University of Rome, and at the University of Teramo in the Abruzzi. I've written several books on nutrition, but they're available only in Italian.

Moreover, Beck and Maltese Consulting are setting up a new business-a joint venture still without a name-with Arsenale. Arsenale runs the Orient Express in Italy. Together we're setting up 8 new Orient Express trains and four hotels in Italy. The trains will be called "Orient Express Dolce Vita": Rome-Venice-Portofino-Rome; "Venice and Tuscany": Rome-Venice-Siena-Rome; "Eternal Stones of Matera": Rome-Matera-Pescocostanza-Rome; "Tastes of Tuscan Vineyards": Rome-Montalcino-Rome; "The Truffle Route": Rome-Nizza Monferrato-Rome; "From Rome to Sicily": Rome-Maratea-Taormina-Palermo; "From Sicily to Rome": Palermo-Taormina-Maratea-Rome; and "Shores of Sicily": Catania-Palermo-Taormina.

In addition to the trains, we will own 4 hotels. The first hotel will be in Venice. It already exists. It's called "Don Giovannelli" and is located in an historic building on the Grand Canal; The second hotel will be in Taormina. We're buying the hotel where we already have the restaurant "St. George". We're going to buy the "Hotel Minerva" in Rome, but it won't be part of our new company because I don't want to have another business in another five-star luxury hotel in Rome. It wouldn't be fair after such a long and successful career at "La Pergola". We will own a fourth hotel, but at this time I can't reveal its name or location. Thanks to our team of professionals, we will be able to manage all these projects.

This interview is similar to the one published in La Madia Travelfood, Italy’s oldest gastronomy and travel magazine, in the January/February 2025 issue.

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