

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

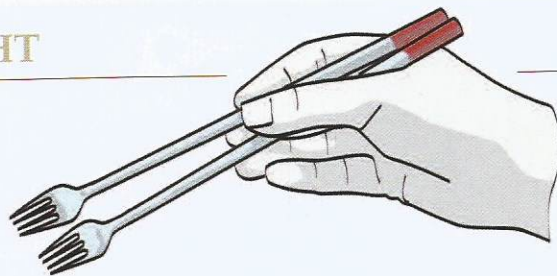
■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

At the time of this writing, a month after its opening, "Me Geisha," founded by Italian-American businessman Giuseppe Turosto two years after his successful restaurant with the same name at Via Roma 59 in Salerno, is probably still Rome's newest restaurant. Just off Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, next door to the Chiesa Nuova, 500 meters from Piazza Navona and across the Tiber from Via della Conciliazione and Vatican City, this slightly cramped restaurant is appropriately located at Via dei Filippini 4 (Filipinos Street, [www.megeisha.it](http://www.megeisha.it), tel. +39-349-9055245). Like its address, its innovative executive chef, Rodelio Aglibot, was born in the Philippines.

Known the world over as "The Food Buddha" because of his dedication to his heritage and his Zen approach to creative menu development, Aglibot was raised in Hawaii and California. "At a very young age I had my first inkling that my professional calling would be cooking. I grew up in a very Catholic family, which gave me a strong sense of unity and of respect for others. A tragedy in life is not to find one's passion... a greater tragedy is to know one's passion and deny oneself of its treasures," he told me at the restaurant's opening on December 1. He credits his parents as his early culinary mentors: his father Reggie, now a retired chef, and his mother Sally, a great cook in her own right. "Follow your heart," they told me. "Cook for love and you will be loved. A great chef does not create great dishes... a great chef inspires great chefs."

After attending UCLA, Aglibot pursued his culinary aspirations at the City College of San Francisco's Hotel and Restaurant Program. Upon graduation in 2000 he was immediately accepted as a year-long apprentice at the Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia, which he still calls "culinary boot camp." Next Aglibot was involved in five restaurant openings in three years, including the well-known "Koi Restaurant" in Los Angeles, where, as executive chef, he started his ascent.

In June 2004 he opened his own "Yi Cuisine" in Los Angeles to critical acclaim. *Food and Wine* named it one of the "Best New Asian Restaurants" in the USA, and *The LA Times* gave it a glowing 2-star review.



### ME GEISHA ROME'S NEWEST RESTAURANT

Stefano Navarini Illustration

Now based in Chicago and Los Angeles, a tireless creative soul who likes to travel the world, since 2006 Aglibot has been responsible for the openings of some 30 restaurants in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Memphis, Hong Kong, Cincinnati, Las Vegas, and Salerno to name a few. He's been a guest on many national television programs in the USA for his New Asian cuisine and has been featured in many print publications. He was recently named one of

"StarChefs' 500 Chefs to Know."

In addition, during the late summer of 2015 he launched "Food Buddha Gourmet," his namesake frozen food line. One of his proudest accomplishments is his non-profit charity named "In Chef's Hands," which connects individuals with special needs who have a passion for food and cooking with established chefs in the Chicago area.

Aglibot visited Italy for the first time eight years ago and first visited Rome five years ago. What convinced him to open a restaurant here, he told me, "was the large range of available fresh seasonal ingredients. All the ingredients at 'Me Geisha' are local or 'Kilometer 0' except the tuna, which comes from Sicily, and a few special fish from Japan. I'm romantic and believe in the value of traditions and culture. Like music, food is a language which helps overcome cultural barriers and creates communication channels between people. To be a chef is a privilege. It is the only art form that uses all five senses; that's how special it is."

The menu at "Me Geisha" is Japanese fusion. Although Aglibot will increase its choices, at the inauguration he served: starters: crispy rice with red tuna from Sicily, lard from Colonnato, and chili; Salmon "Gunkan"; Firecracker Roll; Sushi Trio: Salerno Roll with Tempura Shrimp and Slightly Spicy Tuna; Raw Hamachi (amberjack) with Ponzu (Japanese vinegar); Nigiri (sushi) of scallop with Yozu Kosho (paste of fermented chili peppers and salt); Hearth and Ocean: ramen of broth with pork, chicken and prosciutto dumplings (36-hour preparation); Glazed Chilean Sea Bass with Cucumber Salad; Meat Tataki (slightly grilled and chopped) with wasabi and mushrooms; desserts: rice pudding with ginger and seasonal fruit. Be sure to order a house fruit-based cocktail. ○

From the left: salmon roll; meat tataki; Chef Rodelio Aglibot; a maracuja cocktail; and rice pudding with ginger and fresh fruit

