



Team Scuderia

Success in the restaurant industry is a fascinating and unpredictable thing. The unique chemistry of food, atmosphere, hosts, and guests when everything is working is as palpable as it is indefinable, and to create one is an art in and of itself. The restaurant world is full of individuals who have beaten the odds and found success, but in an open, glass-walled space on Sixth Avenue in New York City's West Village, a new Italian restaurant has opened that proves that a team can truly be more than the sum of their parts. We spoke with two of the four owners of Scuderia, Leyla Marchetto and Fabrizio Sotti (along with Leyla's father, iconic New York restaurateur Silvano Marchetto, owner of Da Silvano, and Da Silvano's General Manager Alessandro Bandini), about their new venture, which is a group effort in so many ways – in ownership and management, certainly, but also in everything from decorating and tasting, even starting with the initial conception.

The paths they took to get here brought them from different parts of the world, and very different career paths. "Ever since I was a kid, I've been on the fence about whether or not I wanted to (literally!) follow in my dad's footsteps," said Leyla. "Da Silvano is four and a half years older than I am, so for my entire life, I have seen my dad work long long hours, day and night... I have always loved the environment in the restaurant – Da Silvano in particular, because it really feels like home to me." After a stint in hotel and restaurant PR, she went out to LA, where she worked for event producer and restaurateur Jeffrey Best doing everything from design work to event coordination at Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals, but the lure of the restaurant world finally drew her back to New York. Fabrizio, meanwhile, arrived in New York from Italy at the ripe old age of sixteen, renting a Harlem apartment by himself, trying to make it in the world of music. "I have always been a musician since I was a little kid. After years of touring and making albums I decided to also become an executive in the music industry. When I realized that the music

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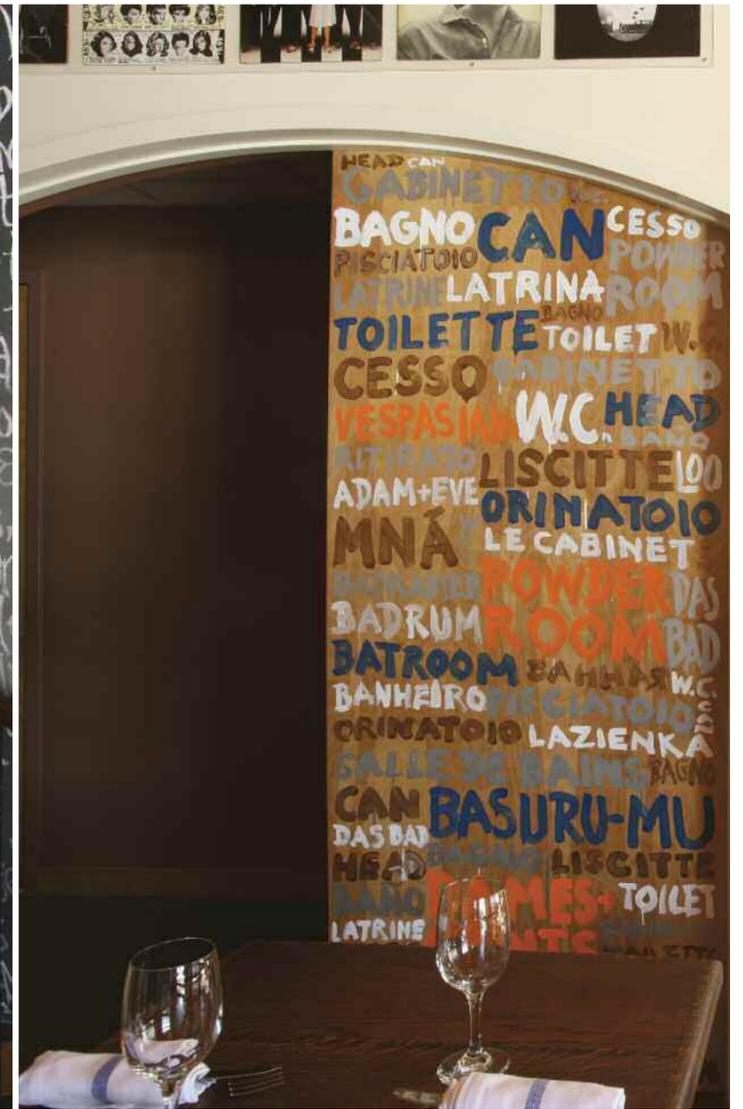
*The Scuderia team, clockwise:
Alessandro Bandini,
Silvano Marchetto, Fabrizio
Sotti and Leyla Marchetto*

business, because of the new technology, was going to suffer a lot and change drastically, I picked another side business where, no matter what, I was going to make money and have fun. People will always need to eat, so why not open a restaurant?" he said. Though he somewhat understates the fact of his music career (he owns his own label, Sotti Records, and has produced records for world-famous hip-hop and R&B artists like Q Tip, Tupac, Ghostface

Killah, and Jennifer Lopez, as well as jazz artists like Al Foster, John Patitucci, Randy Brecker, Michael Brecker, and many more, as well as years of collaboration with Cassandra Wilson) his "why not?" attitude is embodied in the young, fun atmosphere of the place, along with the personalities of the other owners.

"Our team fell into place early last year, when each four of us realized that we wanted to open a new restaurant... When the space across the street from Da Silvano became available, Silvano decided the time was right. He and Fabrizio had been talking about partnering up (since his friend and customer Fabrizio had just opened Dal Toro Lamborghini, an Italian restaurant at the Palazzo in Las Vegas and wanted to partner in a New York project), and Alessandro wanted to become an owner as well. When I heard what was going on I immediately said I wanted to be involved, and we signed the lease about a month later," says Leyla, just two months after the restaurant opening in March.

"I really believe that, to make any business successful, you need a great team," adds Fabrizio. "At Scuderia Silvano brings his legendary status, Leyla is a great organizer and was very helpful connecting all the dots in the construction phase, Alessandro knows how to run the restaurant and has a lot of faithful customers and I bring a little bit of glamour – and I'm good when it comes to numbers," he says, casually identifying one of the key elements of the restaurant, something that Silvano raised to an art form at Da Silvano – the fact that the owners of a restaurant can truly set the mood, rather than staying quiet in the background. "I like going



to places where I know the people who own or run it – it makes the experience more personal and pleasurable,” says Leyla. “I know that Silvano’s almost constant presence at Da Silvano for the last 34 years has played a large role in his success – he is the ultimate host, a natural entertainer, and has an incredible presence that people come back for.” In that same vein, Alessandro is a near-constant presence on the floor, and Leyla and Fabrizio are frequently in the house as well, greeting friends and guests, and meeting new visitors, who are visibly delighted when Silvano makes one of his regular visits from across the street.

Scuderia’s antecedents are a powerful legacy, something the younger members of the crew welcome, even as the whole team agrees that this restaurant will be something new. “My dad doesn’t always give direct guidance, but just watching and listening to him every day at Da Silvano has been what has taught me the most about the business. He has a sixth sense about what is going on, and sees things that happen behind him – I think I inherited some of that,” Leyla said. “We tend to draw a different clientele than we do across the street at Da Silvano, but we do have some customers and friends that eat at both restaurants. We purposely

designed and created an environment that would be completely different from Da Silvano – We don’t have tablecloths, the staff is dressed down, and the vibe is younger and more casual overall, so we attract a kind of second generation than we do at Da Silvano, which is what we wanted to do in the first place.” Fabrizio agrees, noting that, “I think that people like the fact that Scuderia is for everybody and all kinds of people go there.” Scuderia attracts a young, attractive group of customers, many from the neighborhood, many in large parties, and many, as Fabrizio notes one evening with a smile, beautiful women, all contributing to the party atmosphere. “People realize that they can come and eat and drink a lot, have fun, and not spend an insane amount of money. We already have a great set of regulars, who come back a few times a week, because its easy to drop in, and because they can afford to come often,” says Leyla.

The risk of opening a restaurant at any point in our economic history is always significant, but it’s impossible to ignore the effect that the recession has had on the industry as a whole. Scuderia is, by design and by serendipity, a perfect restaurant for its moment. “I think we opened

at a great time, when people, especially in New York, were starting to feel better about the economy, and better because spring and summer were on the way,” says Leyla. “We created a casual, fun, neighborhood destination, and I think our customers enjoy being able to eat good food, in a place where they don’t have to think about what they’re going to wear, or how much they are going to have to spend. We have moderately priced food, and a great wine list, and a great staff that people respond to. Now that the outdoor café is open, we’ve also become a destination that is perfect for the good weather, so that is also bringing people in.” The outdoor seating, an integral part of New York City summer culture, is even clubbier here than most, and since the restaurant has begun offering brunch, it quickly became a weekend destination. The restaurant is 119 seats inside including the 10 seat bar, plus 36 seats outside, and the opening team built out the space from the ground up – “it went from a black hole to a fully operational restaurant after 10 months of design and construction,” Leyla says, a process she describes as taking a toll on everyone. However, the personalization of the space paid off – the room warm and casual, decorated with signature contributions from its own-

ers, from graffiti on the bathroom doors by cartoonist Marisa Acocello Marchetto, Leyla’s stepmother and Silvano’s wife, to their favorite album covers hanging on the walls. The car theme is pervasive throughout – Scuderia” is the Italian word for “stable,” traditionally for racehorses, but most popularly adopted by Ferrari, for their racing team – and that is courtesy of Silvano and Fabrizio, who share a passion for cars. “I have always loved cars. I think that all Italians are in love with cars. When I was finally able to buy a great Italian sports car, it felt like a big achievement and a dream come true,” says Fabrizio, whose collection has grown to include a Ferrari Scuderia, a Ferrari 430, the Dal Toro Lamborghini Museum, dealership, and restaurant complex in Las Vegas, and a Rolls-Royce Phantom that is perennially parked outside of Scuderia, waiting to chauffeur him back to another late night at his Manhattan recording studio.

The passion with which this group of restaurateurs approaches their work naturally spills over into other areas of their lives, and keeps them fresh and grounded. “If you can believe it, when I’m not at the restaurant I cook a lot. My boyfriend is a great cook and a sommelier too, so we like to play around in the kitchen with different recipes and creations.

He is also in the restaurant business, so we're generally talking about food, wine, and restaurants 80% of the time. I love being outside, so I run and bike a lot when the weather is good. Those are pretty much the only time I am not glued to my blackberry or thinking about Scuderia or Da Silvano, so they help clear my head," laughs Leyla. "I'm a sucker for anything beach related, so when I can escape, I head for the water – the Hamptons, Miami, Los Angeles, St. Barths, or our house outside Florence, where we cook, eat, and drink out by the pool overlooking the Tuscan countryside." Her travels most recently took her to South America, to Chile and Brazil, relaxing after the opening with family and friends, and she's already planning more trips well into the fall.

Like so many car aficionados, Fabrizio is an avid watch collector, specifically of Patek Philippe – "I'm obsessed," he says, and he's also a collector of art, most visibly the Arturo de Modica bull statue that sits outside of Scuderia, the twin of the one on Wall Street downtown, and "I deeply love Wassily Kandinsky." After a recent Bahamas escape, his next journey is a summer European tour, promoting his new album. "The new album is called "Against All Odds". It's five years since I have put out an album as a leader and I'm really excited about this. I feel like I'm going back to my roots. To explain you how I got to where I'm today I would need a few hundred pages, but in a few words the ingredients are passion, determination and compassion with a lot of struggle in the journey. Balancing the restaurant with his record label and recording is a challenge – "I have to say that I don't sleep a lot," he admits, "but I have learned to separate my artistic and business lives very well. That helps me a lot to move forward with everything and make the best possible decisions."

All the travel and exposure to the best the world has to offer has given these two individuals an unusually clear perspective on exactly what constitutes a quality restaurant experience. Fabrizio sums it up succinctly, saying it's all about "the service, the quality of the product, and the clientele," and Leyla concurs: "The food, ambiance, and the people make a restaurant. I am really sensitive to the design of restaurants also, and I hate overdesigned and fancy environments, so the more casual and comfortable the place, the better. Probably most important are the people who work at the restaurant. A rude or pomous Manager or Maitre'd, or a crappy waiter can ruin your meal. I was fortunate to grow up in one of the best restaurants in New York, with a father who is an amazing chef, so I really love food. I'm not picky and I don't love fancy food, but I can't stand bad food or food that isn't cooked the right way."

The food at Scuderia reflects this focus on casual and authentic quality. Fabrizio's personal request, the baked tagliolini with black truffles, is on the menu, and friends of the restaurant whisper tales of his own "Pasta di Giorgio," created with friend Giorgio Pivoaan in Italy 20 years ago – not on the menu but restaurant-quality nonetheless. Leyla

is, as she puts it, "a sucker for carbs" – she loves the Pizza al Occhio di Bue, with pecorino, spinach, pancetta and a sunny side up egg in the middle; the Bucatini Amatriciana – "a scrumptious tasty/salty white amatriciana that is made with guanciale (unsmoked Italian bacon)", the brioche grilled cheese, the skirt steak with three dipping sauces, "and for dessert (or with coffee in the morning!) the Nutella Pizzeta (mini dessert pizza) with mascarpone, Nutella, and powdered sugar." The signature cocktails at the bar were cooked up after many a long night tasting, and set the tone for a uniquely intimate evening with the personal vision of these entrepreneurs. Both have plans to continue along their respective paths: "My main focuses at the moment are my own music, even if occasionally I will produce and work with other artists, and to open a few more restaurants around the US. Beside Scuderia I'm really proud to be the co-owner of Dal Toro/Lamborghini at the Palazzo in Las Vegas," says Fabrizio, and while Leyla is focused on Scuderia and Da Silvano for at least the next six months or so, to be sure Scuderia is running smoothly, she's discussing starting a restaurant management group with several close friends: "We have a few concepts in development for 40-80 seat restaurants, most likely in New York, Chicago, and/or Los Angeles. We're also talking about possibly expanding Scuderia to another city, like Miami or Los Angeles, so that's a possibility in the next few years. My dad and I are also talking about opening Da Silvano internationally... Ultimately I really want to open a boutique hotel on a beach, so that is my long-term plan," she smiles, and yet while for most people, this would be a pipe dream, there is something about the mix of hospitality experience and drive that makes anything seem entirely possible. When asked what it is that keeps driving himself and his colleagues from project to projects, Fabrizio simply tosses out the word, "Passion," and while it may be the obvious answer, it's also a powerful one – this stable of entrepreneurs is clearly just beginning their race. ■

