



BRIDAL SHOWERS, GRADUATIONS AND OTHER CELEBRATIONS CAN BE HOSTED ON THE PATIO



THE PENNE OTERO IS AN ORIGINAL DISH SERVED ONLY AT SAPORI



SAL MANIACI, OWNER AND CHEF

## Italian Staycation

Neighborhood restaurant Sapori makes locals feel like Italy is right around the corner.

BY DANI FANKHAUSER | PHOTOS BY JODY TIONGCO

THE WATER SPLASHES UP AGAINST YOUR GONDOLA as you pull up to Newport Beach Yacht Club (if only you owned a gondola and the yacht club had a dock for it). Just a jaunt across Bayside Drive sits Sapori, a little slice of Italy, but you might miss it, distracted by the shopping center's ample parking and shade trees.

The neighborhood folks who live along the water on Bayside Drive or on Balboa Island know to come for a date, dinner with the extended family or plan an afternoon event using Sapori as banquet facilities. The patio was renovated with a glass cover to resemble a garden villa.

"We've had quite a few weddings where people actually got married here by the fireplace," Sal Maniaci, owner and chef, says. "We closed the whole place down, rearranged the restaurant and make rows of chairs."

Before coming to the US, Sal went to chef school in Italy and worked in a few restaurants there. Now,

he balances his roles as business owner and chef. "I oversee the production of all sauces and stocks and things, and at night time I like to be at the front," Sal explains.

Sapori is not Sal's first or only restaurant. With his brothers, he's owned restaurants in Mission Viejo and Tustin. Now Sal runs Sapori on his own while his brothers work in the wine industry. But wine is a foundation of Sapori's allure.

One fine feature of Sapori are the wine dinners Sal hosts from time to time, in which he presents wines from a selected winery. In February he showed Antinori, an Italian winery, with wine pairing by Marchesi Antinori's Lorenzo Montoya.

As chef, Sal prepared a five-course meal with both specials and some of his most popular dishes. For his next wine dinner, Sal may do a California winery or another Italian winery—check Sapori's Facebook page for updates.

The Penne Otero is a signature dish created by Sal. It is made with tarragon, bits of fresh bacon, hot peppers, tomatoes and a little bit of vodka, and a splash of cream, giving it that lush look. You can't get it anywhere else—it's obvious why the dish sells so much. Many of Sal's regulars from the neighborhood come specifically for this dish.

Sal balances his Italian training with creativity, and dishes are inspired by every region of Italy.

"We do swordfish differently," Sal says. "We do Mediterranean-style, grilled with capers, oregano, olive oil and a vinaigrette dressing."

His lamb chops are served in wild porcini mushroom sauce, which is delicious with the risotto.

As always, begin the meal with either prosciutto-wrapped breadsticks or calamari fritti, and end with tiramisu.

Sal says, "Everything is very authentic Italian. We don't do an Americanized twist." ♦

1080 BAYSIDE DR.; 949-644-4220; SAPORINB.COM

HOURS: OPEN FOR DINNER, 4:30 P.M. DAILY | OPEN FOR LUNCH, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, 11:30 A.M. TO 2:30 P.M. | PRICES: \$11.00 - \$27.95

TIP: WINE BOTTLES ARE 50 PERCENT OFF ON MONDAYS