



Annual Italian Dinner. Italian is by far the most popular ethnic cuisine in America. Its great variety ranges from simple pizza to the sophisticated preparations which inspired French haute cuisine. Mary and I love them at sojourns in Veneto, Tuscany, Piedmont, Rome, Sicily & the Amalfi Coast. Therefore, creating a menu for May's annual Italian theme dinner never involves searching for appealing dishes, but rather sifting through an over-abundance of gems. This not-to-be-missed feast will be held at 7:00 pm, Monday and Tuesday May 18th & 19th.

Una Tavola da Allodola

Primi Antipasti

Baked Roman Artichoke

Neapolitan Crostini with Fresh Ricotta, Anchovy & Olive Oil

Marinated Italian Olives & Sweet Peppers

Secondo Antipasto

Lobster Medallions with Spring Onion Fritelle & Limoncello Sauce

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Pasta

Nonna's Linguini with Basil, Spicy Sausage & Sun-Dried Tomato

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Primo Piatto

Fritto Misto Frutti di Mare: Fried Shrimp, Calamari, Scallops & Petite Fish
Wilted Cress & Arugula

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Secondo Piatto

Veal Medallion Saltimbocca Romano with Prosciutto & Sage
Porcini Mushrooms & Fried Eggplant di Giovanni

or

Wood Grilled Branzino Campania with Orange, Fennel & Salsa Verde

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Zuppa Inglese with Lady Fingers, Limoncello and Chocolate & Vanilla Custards
Chocolate-Hazelnut Fritters

The price of this festive event is \$95 per person before beverages, tax and gratuity. As always, an exceptional Italian wine bouquet will be available at nominal cost. The last date for cancellation or reduction of reservations without charge is May 13th. **Note:** Please ring in the summer with us at our **Walk-Around Wine Tasting & Sale on Monday June 8th.** There will be entertainment, fabulous wines, and food aplenty. See page two of this newsletter for more details.

Anniversary Wine Tasting & Sale, Monday, June 8th.

Please join us for this fabulous event. To celebrate the beginning of our 35th year in business we will have an array of spectacular wines in all price ranges and Chef John will delight us with his culinary creations. While there will be several new items, don't fret! John will also be featuring patron favorites: our famous Salt-Baked Shrimp, Rack of Lamb Genghis Khan Canapés, Veggie Tempura, Soft-Shell Crab and more. If Mother Nature cooperates we will have music on the patio and John will be at the grill. So, bring your palates and your appetites and join us for this not-to-be missed event. The cost (which includes wines, food tax and gratuity) is \$60 per person, 6-8pm. Please call the office at (248) 661-4466 or email us at bookings@thelark.com to reserve your space. Don't delay as this event is very popular!

Our Private Wildlife Festival. It all started with an old apple tree on the lakeshore of our home on West Bloomfield Lake. It was there when we acquired the site. The tree was and remains small and neglected, producing apples too small to harvest. Winds eventually broke them loose to fall on the ground and be harvested by deer from the vast nature reserve to our north. A charming sight.

However, Mother Nature went crazy this spring and we name her as the cause of the spectacle we witnessed one mid-afternoon from our great room overlooking the tree on our lakeshore. In a period barely more than an hour, we watched five whitetail deer, two woodchucks, two brown furry muskrats, a variety of squirrels and our recently returned from the South pair of swans harvest all the fallen apples and any other nearby bounty of our natural grass-free setting.

Like many (I hope most) Michiganders, we grew up enjoying the wonderful wild setting that is Michigan and go North as often as possible to immerse ourselves more fully in the outdoors. We must have done something right to have been blessed with our own wildlife festival. We hope it's a preview of joys to come.

Memories of Italy Prompted by our Italian Dinner. Our advice is sometimes sought by friends and acquaintances with questions about aspects of their upcoming trip. Most important is the decision of which European country to visit other than the English-speaking United Kingdom. Our answer and that of most knowledgeable trippers would be Italy. A key reason is the fondness of most Italians for America and its people. No European country has perfect year-round weather but Italy's is as good as it gets. Its history from the Roman Empire onward is unparalleled and its surviving ruins spellbinding. And, of course, its cuisine is almost universally popular -- the most favored cuisine in America. In Italy one may explore beyond the red sauce dishes of its southern regions, native to the majority of Italian immigrants to the U.S., and savor the more varied and sophisticated cuisine of Italy's North.

Often our status as proprietors of a fine restaurant opens doors to unique experiences, such as special welcomes at top wineries arranged in advance by their U.S. wholesale distributors. In our tour of northern Italy years ago it won us a stay in the castle of an important Tuscan winery.

That first visit to Italy was in September 1983, two years after opening The Lark. We were accompanied by Harvey and Jan Burleson; Harvey was a wine importer and wholesale distributor. We dined at eleven Michelin-rated one and two-star restaurants in Italy. We loved the Italian people and countryside and we were especially indebted to Leonardo Marchesi dè Frescobaldi, who was our gracious host at Castillo di Nipozzano outside Florence for three days.

Our connection to Frescobaldi wines dates to the earliest days of The Lark such as when we featured their Nipozzano Reserve Chianti '79 on our early 1984 wine list at an astonishing low price of \$14 per bottle.

Frescobaldi estate wines are some of the most long-established in Tuscany. The respect given them is illustrated by the family's title of nobility and by their palace in the capitol city of Florence at the intersection of the main bridge over the Arno River. A handy fact since it gave us an otherwise unavailable place to park in the busy city. In recent years, Frescobaldi has executed joint ventures with the Mondovi California wine family with notable success.

Our next Italian visit was a Roman holiday. At least at that time, Rome was one of the five most popular destinations in the world. A previously planned trip had been cancelled because our intended host, Edmund Cardinal Szoka, became ill. With His Eminence now fully recovered and resident in Rome as President of the Prefecture of Economic Affairs for the Holy See, the time was right—especially as it was January. We never go to Europe in the summer as I usually only reserve the first night's lodging and a car, and wing it from there. We stayed at the **Hotel Eden** because the American Express Platinum Card program upgraded us to a fine suite, free continental breakfasts and late checkout. The hotel was in a recently restored century-old palazzo, near the Spanish Steps, two blocks from the Via Veneto and convenient to the Piazzo del Popolo. The staff was like family. The concierge booked our dinner at the laid-back **Ristorante Pierluigi** featuring "cuciana tradizionale". We began with an unordered complimentary pasta e fagioli followed by a half portion of fried calamari and shrimp: sautéed fresh baby clams with olive oil and garlic; veal scallops with white wine butter and capers; grilled true scampi; the unique Roman salad of peels from a pungent chicory stalk, anchovies and vinaigrette dressing; and a complimentary of the proprietors homemade cheese with Italy's popular lemon liqueur. Our dinner wine was a Chianti Classico of a good vintage. The evening was made even more enjoyable by the warm hospitality of the waiter and proprietor. Simply put, we were obviously spoiled, probably because of Mary's presence.

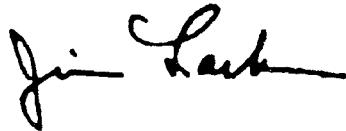
This would be a very long newsletter if I detailed the incredible ancient constructions and later creations of Rome. They greatly exceed those of any other destination in the world. As an example, our first morning included visits to the Emperor Domitian 86 AD Piazza Novana, later graced by Bernini's Fontana del Fiumi (Fountain of the Rivers) and Fontana del Moro (Fountain of the Moor) as well as the Fountain of Neptune and the church of Sant'Agense by Borromini. We next strolled to the Pantheon built by Agrippa 25-19BC, famous for its incredible dome. Every short walk brought us past astounding reminders of antiquity. One of the highlights of our visit was lunch that day at the apartment of Cardinal Szoka, a short walk from St. Peter's Square. We rated the lunch 12 of a possible 10 stars.

It was New Year's Eve. Not wanting to research a holiday celebration in a strange town and country, we simply booked dinner in our hotel hoping, as a New Year's Eve at home, to be asleep on this amateurs' night by 10:30 p.m. Ha! Cenone di Cappodanno at the hotel's top floor **La Terrazza** overlooking a panorama of Rome was an extravaganza. After rejecting the proffered worst table and securing the best window side setting, the orgy began with caviar followed by goose liver with currants and so forth. Our expensive party hats were from Paris and there was live music. I told Mary we were in obvious trouble price-wise, which we had never been told. It was worth a million lira and that's what it turned out to be.

Mass at St. Peter's Basilica on New Year's Day was the highlight of our trip and one of the most moving experiences of our lives. As punishment for the fire of 64 AD, which largely destroyed Rome and was blamed on Christians, Emperor Nero crucified St. Peter at the foot of the Vatican Hill. After converting to Christianity, Emperor Constantine built a Basilica over St. Peter's tomb. It was sacked by the barbarians, rebuilt by various popes and emperors and finally replaced by a new basilica begun by Pope Julius II in 1506 AD and over the next 20 years by 10 great Renaissance architects from Bramante to Bernini and artists such as Michelangelo. The incomparable Baroque masterpiece is said to be capable of holding 60,000 people. The monuments and art, such as Michelangelo's Pieta, are beyond description. The setting when illuminated for celebration of mass on the main altar is overwhelming.

Arriving at 9:00 a.m. to immerse ourselves in this experience to the maximum extent, the Swiss Guards let our taxi through barriers and directed our driver to avoid the lines at the main entrance and drive around the basilica to the left to a small entry near the main altar. We were met by a Bishop who led us to our seats. Three small seating groups had been set up facing the altar. The one on the left was occupied by the diplomats accredited to the Vatican City State in formal attire complete with sashes and medals. In the center section were the Cardinals of the Church present in Rome. Mary and I were stunned to be seated in the front row of the seats immediately to the right of the altar. At 10:00 a.m. applause from the rear of the basilica indicated that His Holiness John Paul II had arrived and began the long procession up the main aisle to the altar. Finally he reached the space before the altar, turned right, proceeded in our direction, blessed Mary and I and those around us and circled the main altar before beginning mass. No staged event, even Aida at the Pyramids of Giza couldn't match the effect of high mass celebrated by His Holiness in the setting of St. Peter's.

Forgive me for rambling but memories of Italy are hard to contain. In addition to the visits mentioned here, others included Milan and the northern lakes region, Venice, and Sicily. All of these trips were related in monthly newsletters, which we hope you treasured and kept, and hope will prompt an Italian Holiday.



Thought for Food®

Mangia bene, ridi spesso, ama molto. – Eat well, laugh often, love much.