

Julia M. Chiarella-Genoni takes a closer look at La Dolce Vita – a restaurant true to its name

# MILAN'S

## hidden treasure

A couple of blocks from the Piazza del Duomo in Milan, on a little side street called via Bergamini, there is a very special meeting point known only to locals. To call it merely a restaurant is damning it with faint praise.

My first experience of La Dolce Vita was when a Milanese took us for lunch near his office. At first I thought we would be eating at a local bar, a quick bite, because there was nothing else in sight nearby. I was totally wrong. We walked towards a building off a side street, which looked like an apartment complex with a number '11' at the door. However, this led to a treasure. It was as if I had stepped back in time. The restaurant was abuzz with the conversation of local business men and the décor was splendid. Beautifully laid tables, Liberty style chandeliers, a skylight and frescoes that covered every single wall. That lunch was one I will never forget, with warm ambience and impeccable service.

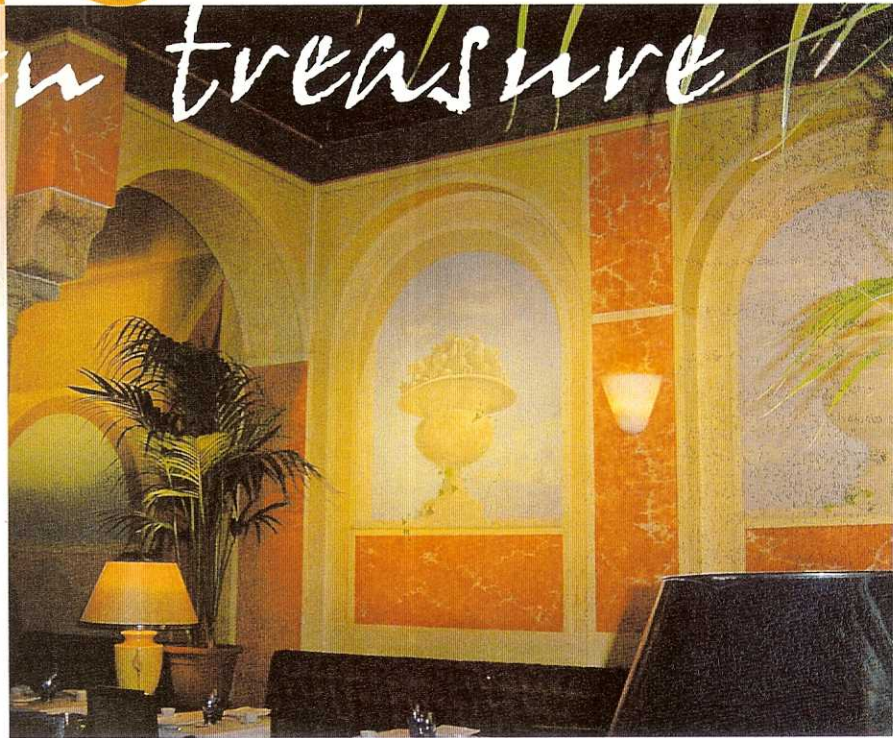
### A LOW PROFILE

Not listed as a tourist hot spot, La Dolce Vita is happy with its anonymity. Keeping to the old tradition of a *luogo d'incontro*, or meeting point, La Dolce Vita does not advertise itself, not even from the main street. In fact, it was only three years ago that the number '11' was placed outside because the post-man could never find the address!

The street, via Bergamini, got its name from the shepherds from Bergamo that travelled through the area when it was still only a meadow. They came down with their flocks and stayed for a few months. They called their sheep *bergamini*, hence the name of the street.

The original building dates back to the 1500s. At that time, to the rear of where the Università Statale now stands, there was a canal which was used to transport the marble for Milan's Duomo.

Originally a place to eat a *panino* with a glass of wine, it was a meeting spot for people working in the area and passing through the city. When the area began to evolve in the 1800s, it eventually became a more formal restaurant. Over the years, it has had many different styles and has been under the present ownership for about 20 years during which time it was renamed La Dolce Vita.



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### OUTSIDE INSIDE

As its name implies, it became a place where people could enjoy 'the sweet life'. A relaxed and comfortable environment was created through period pieces for the bar, the tables, and the chandeliers. But the ultimate décor is in the frescoes. The whole interior is hand painted to resemble the exterior of a building in emerald and coral marble with stone statues of massive fruit bowls and a sky blue background. They were painted by lifelong resident of the building, Fausto Morrè. The Morrè family lived in the residential section of the building, dating back to the early 1900s. Fausto Morrè's father, *Maestro Morrè*, was also an artist and was well known in Italy, painting frescoes in Genoa and Turin. Now 83 years old, Fausto Morrè is still very active and teaches art at the Brera Academy.


### RULING PASSION

Daniele Ferrante has been the manager of the restaurant since 1999. Although he likes to refer to himself as *cameriere aggiunto* (assistant waiter), in reality he is involved in every aspect of



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a pianist plays...*

many businessmen congregate, as well as medical professionals from the nearby hospital and lecturers from the university. In the evening, the clientele and ambience change. Candles are lit, a pianist plays and the more romantic feel attracts many couples, as well as VIPs who want a quiet place to eat without being disturbed. For this reason, the restaurant is divided into sections to keep clients happy and comfortable.

La Dolce Vita truly is a treasure – you are not just a guest, you are at home. The warmth and atmosphere are unique, creating a lasting impression. So if you find yourself in Milan, be sure to pay it a visit. 

**La Dolce Vita, Via Bergamini 11, Milan**  
**Tel. 02-58307418 Opening Hours: 12:30pm-2:30pm, 8:00pm-1:00am. Closed Saturday lunchtime and all day Sunday.**  
**Closed August. Reservation Service: [dolcevita@acena.it](mailto:dolcevita@acena.it)**  
**[www.todine.net/dolcevita.html](http://www.todine.net/dolcevita.html)**

**LOYAL CUSTOMERS**

Clients obviously enjoy the experience as some come every day for lunch and three to four times a week for dinner. At lunch

La Dolce Vita. From choosing staff to placing orders, creating menus and organising events, Ferrante does it all. Although it is hard work with long hours, the passion for the job will always be there: 'Restaurant management is not an easy task. Much energy is needed, as well as money, but it's a job that gives much satisfaction. There are some that study for a lifetime, but once they are in front of customers, they don't have the passion and warmth to communicate with them. If you have the business in your blood, you will do it well and you will be willing to do it anywhere in world.' Ferrante's passion is apparent in the whole dining experience. He knows 90 percent of the customers very well, and keeps a private record of what they like: sparkling or still water, no oil, no salt, favourite table, favourite dish. Everything is taken into account and every customer is made to feel extremely important.

**KEEPING THINGS IN HOUSE**

A meal at La Dolce Vita is the ultimate experience in classic fine dining. Only the bare essentials are bought in: fruit and vegetables, fish and meat. Everything else is homemade. Bread is baked twice a day, pasta is made fresh along with any sauces and fillings. The desserts are famous and one in particular, *torta di cioccolato con pere*, is often requested. The restaurant also produces 15,000 bottles of wine annually at its vineyard near Florence, Agricola San Vettore, as well as olive oil and balsamic vinegar. The result is a meal that exceeds all expectations. Every dish is delectable and to be savoured to the last morsel. Another interesting aspect is the approach to staff. Every three to four months, the chefs and their staff are changed, with chefs from all over the world coming to cook. This ensures constant new contributions to the classic Milanese cuisine. The lunch menu changes every day and dinner every 40 days. The dinner menu offers classic Italian dishes, with approximately five *antipasti*, five *primi* and five *secondi*. Business lunches are roughly €25, while dinners are about €40.