



A Piece of Italy *in Williamsburg...* BROOKLYN

ROBERTO AITA IS READY TO TEMPT YOU WITH BURRATA AND PACCHERI ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EAST RIVER IN HIS NEW NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT THAT TRANSPORTS YOU TO ITALY

by *Susannah Gold*
photos by John Morgan

Walking into Fiore, Roberto Aita's restaurant in Williamsburg, you are immediately met by large wooden credenzas holding plates, wine bottles and a variety of objects that look like they came from your grandmother's house. That is, if your grandmother is Italian. Add the white chairs and tables with no tablecloths and the Italian music in the background and you cannot help but feel that you are in an Italian home, just the image chef and co-owner Aita wanted to project with his new venture in Brooklyn – a restaurant with a neighborhood feel where people might come to eat alone or with friends three or four times a week. Aita prefers not to describe Fiore as a trattoria, but that may be what he achieved, with a twist...a twist that is sure to entice you to make multiple trips out to Brooklyn for a meal.

Fiore, which opened in January, is more upscale than your average trattoria and the food, a cut above most trattoria fare, is exquisite. Aita's desire to create a neighborhood restaurant that will attract repeat customers is evident in the very reasonable prices you will find on his cash only menu. Salads and antipasti cost \$4-\$7, pasta dishes go for \$8-\$12 and secondi top out at \$14. Wines are \$6 by the glass and range from \$21 to \$37 by the bottle.

How long have you lived in the US and how long have you been a chef?

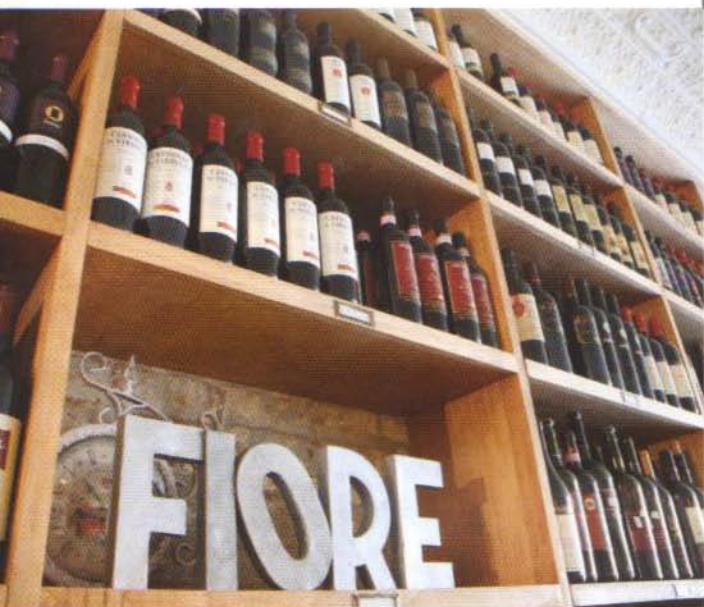
I moved to the United States 22 years ago when I was 18 and have been cooking ever since. I first came over with Tony May of San Domenico. He has helped a lot of young chefs get started in this business. I am originally from Calabria although I spent my formative years on Lago di Como. I grew up on a farm with my grandparents. We used to make everything at home including our own bread, wine and olive oil. My dream was

Roberto Aita (previous page) makes you feel at home as he serves up exquisite plates that recall trattoria fare with a twist. Fiore's interior is simple yet inviting.

to open my own restaurant where I am the chef and at 40, I decided it was finally time to realize that dream.

Why did you choose Williamsburg?

Williamsburg is a growing area with a good vibe. We felt that this was an area where our concept for a neighborhood restaurant would be appreciated. There is a lot of gentrification underway here. It is an interesting area with a variety of people of all ages. We felt that this melting pot, a small microcosm of New York City, could be brought together by good food. Manhattan res-



Have you noticed a change in American eating and drinking habits since you arrived in New York?

Absolutely and it is sometimes quite astounding. We have clients of all ages who are very knowledgeable about Italian food and wine. They are also anxious to learn about new things and that is very satisfying to me as a chef. When I first came here, people wanted spaghetti and meatballs and that was it. Now, people regularly ask me for burrata and paccheri, specific Italian cheeses, etc. We started serving espresso in glass cups and people love that; it's an Italian tradition from certain areas.

Have you brought anything to your menu that is specifically from Calabria?

We use olive oil that reminds me of the oil from Calabria. It is generally stronger than Tuscan olive

taurants are often much trendier but they also close very quickly. We want to be around for a long time. This restaurant is for my daughter Sofia. She's only two so we have to stay in business for a long while.

When you cross the threshold into Fiore it really seems like you have walked into a restaurant in Italy. Did you bring things over from Italy specifically for the restaurant?

We brought over many plates and objects that line the walls as well as some old prints from the 1940s. Most of the restaurant was built by Italian workmen using materials from Italy so that may be the reason that it has such an authentic feel. The floor tiles, for example, are in the medieval black and white pattern that you see all over Italy and were made in Sassuolo near Modena.

BUON ITALIA & MANHATTAN FRUIT

Manhattan. Buon Italia has a large selection of cheese, meats, pastas, desserts and coffees for restaurants. In addition to their wholesale business, Buon Italia has an active retail trade for amateur cooks. For vegetables, Aita uses Manhattan Fruit, also located in the Chelsea Market.

ROBERTO AITA AND MANY OTHER CHEFS BUY THEIR FOOD from Buon Italia, a company located in the Chelsea Market, a food emporium on 9th Avenue in

oil. I would love to add a couple of dishes from Calabria and I am thinking about serving a dish that I love from my home area which is considered caviar from Calabria. Essentially it uses small fish that are made into a paste using a lot of red pepper. The paste is spread on small grilled bread and would make a delicious appetizer. We like hot and spicy foods.

Calabrian wines are beginning to take off now and I think the cuisine won't be far behind.