





The Passion of Leo Bulgarini

Rome native, and former sommelier Leo Bulgarini uses impeccable ingredients, lessons from his past, and a personal creative passion to produce a superior gelato that he pairs with selected wines to create a flavor alchemy that must be experienced to be understood.

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▼ **I WAS LUCKY TO HAVE SCORED TWO TICKETS** TO THE RECENT LOS ANGELES TIMES NITE BITES, HOSTED BY JONATHAN GOLD, AT THE LA TIMES PRINTING PRESSES WHERE THE EVENT WAS BEING HELD. I WAS EXCITED ENOUGH TO SKIP LUNCH AND TO FORGET THAT I WAS EXPECTED TO GIVE A TALK AT SOUTHWEST COLLEGE. UPON ARRIVAL, IT WAS AS IF WE HAD BEEN INVITED TO THE PROMISED LAND OF AMAZING EATING: "MEALS BY GENET," "STARRY KITCHEN," "NANCY SILVERTON'S," "MOZZA,"

"Jitlada," Wolfgang Puck's "Cut," to name a handful of the amazing abundance of restaurants in attendance.

My wife seemed to have an unerring ability to find the most delicious bites at the stations with the shortest lines...and with the hottest food. We stopped at Jitlada and it was as I remembered, delicious and incendiary. A few nibbles and my mouth burned in way that even

a frosty draft mug of Stella, served by a leggy blonde in a super tight dress couldn't quench.

Then, as ideas born out of necessity often do, Bulgarini's Gelato appeared to me as a perfect solution to a painful problem. We hurried to where Leo Bulgarini was doling out the gelato to an appreciative and impatient crowd. Then disappointment settled in: The line was as long as any line we would see all night;

even among the top echelon Los Angeles restaurants represented there. Doing my best to endure my burning mouth, we stood in that interminable queue and watched those lucky few ahead of us, including Wolfgang Puck who slipped to the front of the line. Puck, apparently assuming some chef to chef prerogative, soon moved behind the counter to serve himself, much to Leo's obvious annoyance.

Finally, happily it was our turn as one of Leo's assistants scooped my favorite into a cup; olive oil infused yogurt with salt. I wondered if my traumatized tongue would revive. Miraculously, after a couple spoonfuls I could feel it again and I could taste what I already



THE ALCHEMIST AT WORK. Leo Bulgarini makes unparalleled gelato. The wines he chooses to pair it with create something even more magical.

knew to be true; the yogurt was brilliantly flavored, tart and alive on my tongue and the olive oil rich and arboreal.

My introduction to the bountiful charms of Bulgarini's Gelato was through a friend who pursues good food with a tremendous, singular passion. On top of that, he's not price sensitive; while I most certainly am. I like to think of myself as frugal...real frugal. It is simply not advisable to develop high-end sensibilities on a writer's insecure income. Bulgarini's is very much at the high end of the price point nationally for Gelato. However, after my first visit and first taste of the of the quality of the ingredients, I was irreparably hooked. Given the complexities of the pistachios and the almonds, the wonderful richness of the milk, what could I do, but be grateful to have such a high quality product so close to home. You can't take it with you, as far as we know, and I think Leo's Gelato is a taste of heaven anyway.



HAZELNUT GELATO WITH GAVI

Gavi is an Italian wine, made from the grape of the same name, and similar to pinot grigio. Aged in steel barrels, Gavi displays a crispness and a distinct hint of minerality. The clean dry finish perfectly balances the nutty sweetness of the hazelnut.



GOAT'S MILK GELATO AND COCONIBS WITH PINOT NOIR

Technically a savory gelato, the creamy pungent notes of the frozen confection provide a vivid contrast to the bitterness of the dark 100% pure cocoa chips. The gelato's smooth semi-sweetness is rounded off by the mild, slightly fruity presence of the wine.



NECTARINE SORBET WITH TREBBIANO MALVASIO

This wine, a blend from central Italy, displays a crisp light savignon blanc like character that provides the perfect balance for the hyper fruity sweetness of the sorbet.



KONA COFFEE GELATO & STOUT BEER

The coffee used to flavor this gelato is grown under macadamia nut trees in Hawaii and maintains a distinctive sweetness throughout the roasting process. The rich creamy smoothness of the dark beer is like a cozy cocoa blanket laid across the intense coffee flavor of the gelato.



ELEPHANT HART PLUMB SORBET & PINOT NOIR

A gentle pinot noir with melon, minimal fruit tones, and some pronounced nuttiness, this wine melds perfectly with the intense, absolutely plumb-like fruitiness of the sorbet.

Leo's commitment to quality is unbending. He recently explained to me that not long ago he noticed that his source for chocolate no longer met the exacting standards for his gelato. When he asked his contact at the company, a Frenchman who refused to acknowledge the decline, Leo doggedly pursued the point until the Frenchman conceded that the chocolate wasn't as good as it used to be. Having demonstrated the unassailable integrity of this palate he was soon getting the good chocolate once again.

Even in Italy, the birthplace of gelato, such a commitment to quality is rare. In fact, trying Gelato in Italy was a big disappointment; Leo, a Rome native, explained that this was due to the industrialization of the product. This fact particularly distressed him because of his upbringing in the Italian food business. "I was born in Rome Italy in 1969 and at 4 years old I would help my uncle in the summer with his restaurant. La Cucina Locale. Great food and two to three flavors of Gelato made fresh every day with the help of Ignazio. From early on I helped Ignazio put together the ingredients that were needed to make the product. Fresh eggs pulled from the hens, fruits directly picked from the tree, olive oil and wine stored

in the seller from the year before. He would use both olive oil and wine to enhance the dessert, right over the top of the gelato. People loved it."

Leo is an uncompromising risk taker, driven to reach a goal that perhaps his fans won't appreciate or even comprehend immediately, but he's going for it anyway. I asked about his new project and he responded with enthusiasm: "The concept for the Bulgarini Gelato Wine Bar is to bring to life an exceptional pairing of ingredients (that are used in the Gelato), with a specific wine or beer, thereby enhancing the experience. I want the customer to say, 'Wow, I can actually go home and use this fine spirit and cook something that will be heavenly matched.' Whether cooking a pierogi or a dolmades it will be the pairing to have. I came to the States with a degree in Agricultural Sciences. I became a Sommelier and started to gradually go back to the simplicity of ingredients by experimenting on my own. Trattoria Tre Venezie in Pasadena was a great source of inspiration. Here I met the Chef, Gianfranco Minuz. His food was amazing for its simplicity and perfect symbiosis of ingredients. This is where I perfected what I call 'the

experience'. Every dish has to be paired with its matching wine and dessert. It wasn't until I opened Bulgarini Gelato that everything came together. A great bottle of wine, together with the right gelato and the customer is enthralled. Gianfranco and I work closely now to perfect all his dishes. In January at a private event in South Pasadena, he cooked three kinds of pork, with Polenta and verza, which I paired with a Gorgonzola Gelato and Amontillado Sherry. The Gorgonzola is not a dessert until paired with the Sherry and alongside the pork, finishes off delightfully. I am looking at opening a Gelato- Wine Bar in Pasadena soon. For now we continue to amaze customers at private events." Amazing truly is the most apt description of the gelato experience at Bulgarini's.

Wherever and whenever Leo Bulgarini opens his new restaurant concept, I will be there with the excitement of a child opening presents at Christmas. I imagine many of us who want to experience some of the finest culinary craftsmanship our region has to offer, will be there too.

Until that time I plan on exploring a few of Leo Bulgarini's marvelous wine and gelato pairings on my own. ☺



BUFFALO MILK GELATO & VINHO VERDE WHITE

Vinho Verde is a dry white blend from Portugal. This easy-going, crisp white wine pairs well with the super-creaminess and distinctive buffalo milk flavor of the gelato. This pairing makes an excellent pallet-preparing starter.



CHOCOLATE GELATO AND PASO ROBLES CABERNET

Made with only the finest swiss chocolate, the gelato's sweetness emerges from the bitter chocolate surroundings under cover of the smokey and intense cabernet influence.



BELGIAN VANILLA CUSTARD GELATO WITH CHILEAN CHARDONEY

Fermented in stainless steel barrels and displaying a distinctive hint of lime, the wine's natural acidity is cut by the velvety smoothness of the custard. A true dessert experience.



BLUEBERRY GELATO AND PINOT GRIS

An early harvest Italian pinot gris with its refreshingly low acidity will provide a delightful balance with the gentle yet faithful fruitiness of the blueberry.



GORGONZOLA GELATO WITH AMATIALLDO SHERRY

A pairing inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's "Cask of Amatiiallido", the serious sharpness of the gelato cries out, like a man trapped, for the countervailing sweetness of the sherry. A pairing that exponentially multiplies the sum of its delicious parts.