

LA'S MOZZA PIZZA TO GO, GREEN

Did you know that Las Vegas means “the meadows” in Spanish? Apparently Chef Mario Batali did. Sin City, famous for its excessive consumerism, gambling and light pollution, is now home to Batali’s farmers’ market, Molto Vegas. Could there really be the potential for green pastures and a market garden that is truly local and sustainable, in the middle of the desert? And led by this country’s top restaurateurs?

“What is ‘green?’” asks Batali at the launch of Molto Vegas. “Green is really more of a lifestyle and an attitude.” It’s very apparent that green is more than a movement or a passing trend for Batali and his business partner Joe Bastianich. It’s a commitment to finding the finest sustainable ingredients for their restaurants across the country and they are proud to carry certification from the Green Restaurant Association. Here in Los Angeles, they partner with Nancy Silverton and co-own Mozza. Despite a terrible economy Mozza is one of a handful of restaurants where it remains nearly impossible to get a reservation. Highly successful and environmentally responsible as well?

What does green mean to you and your restaurants?

MARIO BATALI: Almost all of the fruits and vegetables on all of our menus are grown by responsible farmers within 200 miles. In fact, it’s almost a selfish decision. Local produce captures the delicious geo-specificity that distinguishes the great food regions of the world, but most important to me it just tastes better.



left to right: MOZZA OWNERS NANCY SILVERTON, JOE BASTIANICH AND MARIO BATALI

It’s an amazing thing in the middle of an artificial-looking world [Las Vegas] to have a green farmers’ market. People think I’m putting on a circus show but it’s real. I have to loan the farmers money to get the produce here. It’s the idea of being part of a community, the idea of interacting with farmers and having them interact with us; it’s what sustainability really is. *Sustainability* is such a pop term, it means jack to me! It’s too used! But when you talk about loaning money to your farmer so he can bring you the best produce, what better use of my funds?

Mozza has a Green Restaurant Association certification. Was that hard to get?

NANCY SILVERTON: It wasn’t difficult to get because it was the direction that we wanted to go in anyway. They’re not asking you to change everything about your operation. They give you a whole list of compliances and then you pick a certain amount. So obviously we picked the things that worked best for us.

A lot of those things you were probably doing anyway?

SILVERTON: Right, but some were different. We had to get a new trash company, because we were no longer recycling the traditional way of bottles and cans. It’s more like food and paper go together and everything else is trash. We always recycled but now we had to do it a different way. Another example: In the employee’s washroom there’s no paper towels, just a blower—but they don’t require that in your restrooms for the guests, so you have a choice of going either way. All of the packaging for Mozza2Go is green, but that’s something we would have wanted to do.

Do you still have bottled water in the restaurant?

SILVERTON: Well, we have bottled water, but we have a system for bottled mineral or bottled carbonated, which we do on the premises. We’ve always had in-house filtered water.

What was the motivation behind going green?

JOE BASTIANICH: Sustainability and going local is not done just to be certified and to use it as a PR campaign; it actually does make your product better, it makes your restaurant better, it makes the people who work in it better, it ultimately complements and enhances the customer experience and that's what this is all about.

BATALI: Sustainability really just means taking a small bit of responsibility for using a fair share of resources at the rate that they can be reproduced without the bleeding of peripheral resources.

What makes Mozza green?

BASTIANICH: We are certified green and I think it starts with the spirit of the restaurant, with the type of food from Nancy. The kind of produce you have in LA we can only dream of in NYC. With that kind of bounty and availability of great produce, the restaurant naturally evolved out of that.

BATALI: It is sick! The access you guys have to unbelievable stuff at farmers' markets.

How often do you get to go to the farmers' market?

SILVERTON: I only get to go vicariously, meaning that Matt [Molina] and Dahlia [Narvaez], our chefs, go to the Santa Monica Farmers' Market every Wednesday and they supplement when necessary at the Hollywood Farmers' Market on Sundays.

How does your time spent in Italy influence your life here in the United States?

SILVERTON: It reinforces the type of the food I like to eat. There, I eat very local food prepared very simply. When I'm in Italy I love to throw gatherings, informal dinner parties, that remind me how much I like to entertain and be around people. It does help me get over the rush of most of my time here and to actually be able to relax and gather energy.

BASTIANICH: Being brought up in an Italian household, I think that the sensibility of the Italian lifestyle, especially how it applies itself directly to food and wine, is an incredible moral compass to live your life by: moderation, health and balance that comes with the Italian table of how to live your life. If you take



that sensibility and apply it to your life at large, there's a lot to be garnered from that.

Do you think people in the States moved away from local sustainable living that's been more a part of life in Europe, and do you think America is moving back to this? Why?

SILVERTON: I think there's certainly been a shift back to this. Because it's the right thing to do and there have been enough strong advocates of that movement, whether it's the Alice Waterses or Michael Pollans of the world, there's been so much pressure from respectable communities for change.

BATALI: It kinda makes a logical sense. It would seem to be the clear and obvious next step to the evolution of mankind to leave the next generation a planet capable of sustaining its energy and food reserves. The first and easiest step is to simply buy as many of the things you eat from a local food producer as possible.

BASTIANICH: I think that people are getting back to it. I think maybe it took the economic crisis to have people really wake up to the fact of what's important in their lives again, what do they want to spend their time doing and who do they ▶



PHOTOGRAPH: Tony Molina



want to spend their time with and what enhances their quality of life.

In Europe you have the local market, you're eating what's in season...

BASTIANICH: But it's not just that. It's also that on your way to the market you talk to people, you know the shopkeeper, you know the guy who bakes and sells you your bread. Everything about these human interactions that revolve around everyday activities are the basic fundamentals of what life should be about.

Does Mozza grow any produce?

SILVERTON: My father has a large garden in Encino. Kenter Canyon Farms started their garden in his backyard 30 years ago so his land is very fertile because they took great care of it. Last year for the first time we planted tomatoes for the restaurant. That was really terrific. We are planning on doing a garden on our roof for herbs and things and we're also going to do an herb wall, a green wall in front of the restaurant, that'll be right outside Mozza2Go on Melrose Avenue.

I guess you serve your wine at Mozza, so that could count?

BASTIANICH: My business is that of being a restaurateur; my passion is wine.

I'm not technically a winemaker but I'm intimately involved in all three of our wineries. The wines are very personal and important to me.

Is all your wine organic?

BASTIANICH: We have one winery that will be certified biodynamic next year which is currently organic. [Pause] That's my problem, what does organic mean? In Europe it means something different, right? I know that organic is such an abused and misused word in this country that I almost hate to put it in any sentence.

In Las Vegas you talked about drinking a glass of wine being an agricultural act. What did you mean by this?

BASTIANICH: It's kinda the essence of the green movement, at least as it applies to wine. To get away from all the marketing, packaging, scores and everything that selling wine's been built and sold around. Getting to the fact that wine is truly a product of agriculture. The concept of growing grapes, the offspring of vines, and then taking mature grapes and through alcoholic fermentation turning the sugar in the grape juice into alcohol and making wine. It will happen if you don't do anything to it. Very ancient and natural processes, and I think we are

getting consumers to realize that more and more, that wine in every way is truly a natural product.

Where do you like to eat in LA?

BATALI: I had a great meal at Michael Cimurusti's place [Providence] last year. Boy, is he talented. You guys have a lot of talent. Unfortunately, unlike Manhattan where in 30 blocks I can see 10 great chefs' restaurants, in LA you've got to go 30 blocks to see one! But you know what? You get to live by the beach! That's the payback.

SILVERTON: I live right near Mozza and I tend not to travel west of La Cienega, so when I say "where do I like to eat," it's really in this neighborhood. Although last night I went to a restaurant that I've been going to recently because I think it's really terrific called Church and State, downtown, I think it's a great restaurant, but locally I go to AOC and Lucques and Hungry Cat and Jar.

What is the perfect dinner for you?

SILVERTON: At least 80 percent of it would be food you can eat with your hands. I love that. It would take place outdoors and luckily in Southern California that's 90 percent of the time. Oh, and I like room-temperature food.

BASTIANICH: It depends on where. It could be anything from a taco truck in LA, or linguini vongole at the beach, or skiing in the mountains with my kids and having Wienerschnitzel. It depends on the location. Life is all about moments.

What makes for a great night in the restaurant?

SILVERTON: Certainly the flow of it. I love a busy restaurant. I don't like a crazy restaurant. I love when we are busy from 5:30 to 11 at a nice steady pace and where I feel like everybody is on that night and I can peripherally see that the food is going out, that everything is perfection. You get a vibe—when the

customers are happy and you are happy and it's great.

How often do you cook in LA, Mario?

BATALI: I am there once a month. At Osteria Mozza and Pizzeria Mozza, both of them.

Tell me a bit about Mozza2Go.

BASTIANICH: Well, Mozza2Go is pretty straightforward—it's Mozza, to go!

Mozza2Go opening was delayed, why?

BATALI: When I was 30 years old I might have opened a couple of things without all the permits and kinda without the right size bathroom. I'm way under the microscope now so we have to do it all right and do it in time and it costs a little more and it's not as quick and easy. But that said, it's a better example for the industry.

Will you be in the kitchen at Scuola di Pizza?

BATALI: You can book me! It's not a school per se with classes on a regular basis. It's effectively a way for you to book me or Nancy or Matt Molina to host your party.

So we could do an edible LA party?

BATALI: That would be a blast!

SILVERTON: It's a private dining space with Matt and I cooking right in front of guests. It's one of the few cooking schools that actually have a pizza oven in it.

BASTIANICH: We'll do a Naples-inspired dinner made with local produce from LA with Italian wine pairings and with Palmina, a Santa Barbara vineyard using Italian varietals. ■

On October 1 *edible Los Angeles* and Mozza are planning an intimate charity dinner for 36 people at Mozza Scuola di Pizza, with Nancy Silverton and Matt Molina cooking and Joe Bastianich pairing wines. For information about how to buy a ticket, please visit edibleLA.com



YOU'RE INVITED TO JOIN US AND

BET on THE FARM!

A SUSTAINABLE, LOCAL FARMERS' MARKET



Mario Batali & Joseph Bastianich
present the

Molto Vegas Farmers' Market

Thursdays 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
(INDUSTRY PREVIEW AT 10:00 AM)

7485 Dean Martin Drive · AT ELDORADO
Suite #106 · Las Vegas

Molto Vegas is committed to finding the best produce for our restaurants and now we'd like to introduce you to our local farmers. Plus our forager, Kerry Clasby from California Family Farms, has loads of resources to share with you.

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We are looking for chefs, restaurateurs and anyone else committed to supporting local farms and their products. If you'd like a table at the Farmers' Market, please contact Doug Taylor, Molto Vegas Executive Pastry Chef at dtaylor@moltovegas.com

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For information about California Family Farms you may also contact Kerry Clasby at kerryclasby@aol.com

MARIO BATALI
MOLTO VEGAS
JOE BASTIANICH
THE VENETIAN & PALAZZO RESORT HOTEL & CASINO





The market is presented by Molto Vegas in conjunction with Kerry Clasby and local farmers from the Las Vegas area.