

# A taste of things to come

Giacomo Bulleri built an empire during a life-long career in restaurants. Thanks to his similarly inspired heir, it continues to grow.

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A little hamlet of bronze foundries and marble workshops, Pietrasanta sits among the beach resorts of northern Tuscany, nestled next to Forte dei Marmi. Over the years its cobbled streets have attracted a community of resident artists and, increasingly, summertime vacationers.

Just beyond the town's sculpture-filled main piazza, a doorway opens onto a courtyard where antique wooden tables and chairs await diners, surrounded by a riot

of foliage – jasmine vines, palms and orange, lemon and fig trees. A marble-topped bar shaded by a striped awning looks to have been serving cocktails for decades. In truth, though, this is the newly opened outpost of Da Giacomo, a celebrated restaurant empire from Milan come to laidback Pietrasanta.

Giacomo Bulleri, a passionate restaurateur even now at the age of 93, is the eponymous head of this miniature empire, which includes

several restaurants, a pastry shop, *tabaccheria* and deli, all on a single Milan street, plus a lofty site in the city's landmark Arengario building and a café in neighbouring Palazzo Reale. "That's me – Giacomo," Bulleri says, acknowledging that among a certain set of Milanese, his first name is well-known enough to forego the surname. With his Borsalino and toothy smile, he is every bit the benevolent host, a Tuscan native who still taunts the urbanites using an indecent Italian term for "uptight" but proclaimed with a heavy dose of affection.

Bulleri was a small-town boy whose family sent him to Turin to find restaurant work when he was 11. But by 1957 he had managed to open the first Da Giacomo restaurant in Milan and in 1989 he relocated it to Via Sottocorno, a formerly dull street that's become his lively dominion: a gastronomic enclave known for serving traditional recipes. The first Sottocorno bistro was designed for free by famed architect and faithful punter Renzo Mongiardino, a maestro at creating sumptuous yet subdued interiors. Every subsequent location, including the Da Giacomo

outpost in Pietrasanta, has been designed by Mongiardino's former collaborators Roberto Peregalli and Laura Sartori Rimini. A timeless tenor defines all Da Giacomo locations – they are shrines to the comforting type of old-fashioned restaurant experience safeguarded by Bulleri. "Milan has given me so much," he says. "But I've also given so much to Milan."

Reaching the end of his long, initially scrappy and finally triumphant career, Bulleri has found a successor in his daughter Tiziana, who spent her youth labouring in his restaurants ("the only way for young people to learn this business is at the side of old people," her father says) and who eventually helped manage the trattoria's move and expansion with her husband. "We grew the business to create a brand and give meaning to all those years my father worked," says the younger Bulleri.

Continuing the entrepreneurial lineage, her own two daughters, Elena and Giulia Monti, opened the Da Giacomo pastry shop on Via Sottocorno, which bakes for all of the restaurants and sells dainty desserts to the public. For Tiziana, family is fundamental because "you need a nucleus around you that understands how hard this work is. You start at 08.00 and you might not finish until 02.00. And in between you have to be ready to cover absolutely any role – washing dishes, mopping, giving a hand in the kitchen."

She launched the new Pietrasanta locale in June, the eighth Da Giacomo spot and the first beyond Milan, undertaking a move away from her native city, because she fell in love with the lush garden where the restaurant now resides. She also yearned to run her own branch of Da Giacomo with her best friend, Rossana Di Pasqua, who relocated to Pietrasanta to help her. "For a woman in Italy, starting a business from scratch is very difficult," she says. "But I have my father who paved an easier path for me – and what else would I do, stay home and knit sweaters? Business is more exciting."



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