

(1) Buffet vegetables (2) Solomeo vineyards (3) Slicing prosciutto (4) Cucinelli's canteen (5) Serving veal (6) Head chef Moreno Alunni Proietti



1 2



**Brunello Cucinelli
Solomeo, Italy**

The Brunello Cucinelli canteen in Solomeo, a medieval Umbrian village restored by the brand's founder himself, is a sprawling double dining room with fireplaces, long wooden tables and floor-to-ceiling windows.

By 10.00, head chef Moreno Alunni Proietti is busy preparing a typical lunch for employees and guests: slices of fresh veal and pasta pomodoro. As he stirs washbasin-sized pots of tomato sauce, he'll boil up 30kg of rigatoni and hand-knead 70 loaves of *torta al testo*, the region's flat griddle-baked bread. Around him, his 13-person team, all Umbrian, set about preparing grilled aubergine, roasted cabbage, radicchio with balsamic vinegar and a medley of other seasonal vegetables and salads for the buffet.

"Brunello wants food that's simple and not overly elaborate – three flavours maximum, otherwise you can't grasp the quality of these top-choice ingredients," says Alunni Proietti. As he speaks, the day's vegetable delivery arrives from a nearby grower. The butcher also delivers twice a week and the local shepherd brings his farm-made ricotta once a week. There's an old-style artisanship to the whole thing that Cucinelli stubbornly refers to as "normalcy".

Alunni Proietti's CV:

1981 Chef at the Casa del Pellegrino hotel and restaurant in Roccaporena, Umbria

1982-1988 Summer chef at the Royal Grand Hotel in Viareggio, Tuscany, and winter chef at the Casalpina hotel in Canazei, Trentino, later cooking at the Altavilla Hotel in Spello, Umbria

1990 Began working as chef at the Relais San Clemente in Bosco, Umbria

2014 Started as chef at the Brunello Cucinelli canteen

Menu:

To start

Rigatoni with tomato sauce

Main

Roasted veal with rosemary.
Assorted vegetables

Dessert

Chocolate and ricotta crostata.
Clementines. Walnuts

To drink

Montefalco red wine. Still and sparkling water



3

Since he first tried his hand with a collection of brightly coloured cashmere sweaters in 1978, Cucinelli's company has grown from a four-person operation to a business employing more than 1,000 people, with an annual turnover of more than €500m in 2017. His products sell a lifestyle – long meals and fireside chats in the undulating Umbrian hills – and his company headquarters are a living embodiment of this idea, with food playing a central role in communicating his values when people come to Solomeo.

"It's essential that our visitors, even the very important ones, eat Umbrian food, our *cucina povera*, our humble cuisine," says Alunni Proietti, who has worked there since the expanded canteen opened in 2013. "That's how they understand our lifestyle here."

Key to this vision of hospitality is a sense of equality. Investors, analysts, bankers, private clients – all of Cucinelli's business guests end up here in the canteen, breaking bread with his employees. Everyone is served the same menu, the only difference being that visitors are allowed alcohol with their meal. Today, as the hall fills with the scent of roasted rosemary, a table of buyers from shops around Italy who have come to learn how to merchandise the brand's products share a bottle of Umbria's Montefalco red wine with their pasta.

Around them about half of the company's onsite employees are settling at tables set with bisque-coloured ceramic plates, terracotta bowls of fresh bread and wood boards of sliced pecorino and prosciutto. The history of Solomeo is printed on the thick, felted paper of the placemats and



4

"It's important that all our visitors, even the very important ones, eat Umbrian food, our 'cucina povera'"

there's no plastic in sight; the olive oil is made from Umbrian Dolce Agogia olives, which this year Cucinelli began pressing in his own mill. "This isn't a cafeteria," says one visitor. "It's a restaurant."

But the canteen is not just to wow guests. It's a core part of Cucinelli's philosophy of "humane sustainability", which involves investing heavily in the well-being of his employees, his town and the surrounding lands, with an emphasis on an excellent lunch. The lunchbreak from 13:00 and 14:30 is sacrosanct and his staff eat a subsidised farm-fresh meal for just €3.20.

Sitting in the head office overlooking his factory, the grapevines, the olive groves and the village he has lovingly restored, Cucinelli, 65, scribbles concepts onto loose sheets of white paper. "I want to maintain things of great quality. Every detail merits attention," he says, pointing to the red-lined inner pocket of his cashmere blazer. "That's our taste, our know-how as Italians. That's why I've never considered producing abroad. The details are just as important as fresh bread and prosciutto." — LR



5 6



PHOTOGRAPHER: Rocco Rovandelli