

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Lounge



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Firenze, Italy has something new and exciting to celebrate! **Ori Kafri** opened his restaurant called **Lounge**, next to his hotel, **J.K. Place**, www.jkplace.com, at Piazza Santa Maria Novella, 7, in November 2004. (Read our article on **J.K. Place**, which opened in May 2003 in our **Hotels & Resorts** section.)

Edward F. Nesta and I enjoyed a pre-opening dinner at Lounge Bar in late October, before the official grand opening to the public. It is a gorgeous restaurant with green and creamy white walls, architectural prints, with wingback chairs, a woven fabric sofa and zebra print ottoman flanking the fireplace, the banquettes are adorned with green, black and white satin pillows, and there is music softly playing in the background. The tables are formally dressed with white linens, and illuminated with tea lights set in low clear glass bowls, with orchid blossoms in low square glass vases.



The atmosphere, as well as the gorgeous staff, is young, hip and trendy. Gabriele Saggia, Manager and his wait staff, as well as Executive Chef Massimo Bocus, Sous Chef Marco, and Pastry Chef, Romina, are on their way to a smooth start. The food was fabulous and the service was very smooth considering pre-opening jitters that one usually comes to expect at new restaurants.

We began with a Maratsch Gewürztraminer, 2003 from Austria which had a taste of sweetness en bouche with flavors of pear, peach, honey and ripe fruit, with a 13.5% alcohol level, paired with an amuse bouche of mozzarella ice cream with quartered red cherry tomatoes and tapenade. The ice cream was actually more like a mousse, and had a slightly sweet taste, which provided a yin yang to the bitter saltiness of the tapenade. I followed that with Scottish Smoked Salmon with dill citronette, that was piled high over julienne greens, sprinkled with pine nuts, and served with toasted marble bread and orange and rosemary flower butter that was served in an oriental-style raised rectangular plate and was topped with black sesame

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seeds. Edward sampled the Chianti Sushi, a spicy sushi beef with red pepper mustard. For our next course, Gabriele paired a Monte Schiavo Conticortesi Rosso Conero, 2001, which was a deep, rich color, had a very balanced nose, and en bouche had rich flavors of blackberry, with a spicy, peppery finish and long legs. The wine was a very good companion to my Caserecche with broccoli, Parmesan cheese, toasted pine nuts with orange meat, zest and truffle butter, and Edward's Pappa Pomodoro, a typical Tuscan dish of tomatoes, bread and onions, which came garnished with a crown of bay leaves. Both of the dishes were excellent, although we felt that the Pappa Pomodoro would benefit from a little extra freshly ground black pepper, which we added, and it rounded out the flavor of the dish. In Italy we had to taste the cheese course, which was presented with Corbezzolo honey, pears and cassis, truffle honey and red pepper mustard sauces served in oriental spoons.



Dessert was a warm chocolate Piedmont cake with Tuscan saffron and vanilla ice cream, and a ciambella with raspberry and white chocolate with a rum sauce and vanilla ice cream. After dinner, Gabriele took us on a tour of the Lounge downstairs, which has sexy pink lighting, white sofas and round white tables. The Lounge is open until 2:00 am and will serve "miniatures", like pieces of a mosaic where guests can have a taste of many items. Outside the restaurant, there are comfortable tables and chairs where guests can sit under market umbrellas and relax and enjoy drinks or a bite to eat.



After dinner, we joined Massimo in front of the fireplace for a few glasses of a 1999 Vin Santo. Vin Santo, a Tuscan wine, has a great balance of sweetness with a smell of wood. Vin Santo must have a minimum of five years aging, and while the 1997 was a great vintage, he felt that the 1999 was even better, and Edward and I agreed. This dynamic, dedicated chef designed the restaurant's kitchen, and buys his herbs and many products from an organic and biodynamic farm. He is passionate about food and wine, and said that he thinks about pairing wines and food. He is not a sommelier, but is connected in his passion for food. He also said that, "chocolate is said to be a food of God, but Saffron is the gold is God." He makes his chocolate cake with pepper in the chocolate and with saffron from the Chianti region. He believes that it is important that "when people come here, everyone is a king." High standards to maintain, but I believe that he can and his staff are up to the challenge.

Lounge

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