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Something Worth Cooking For

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Abstract:

Abstract: When we eat food, we often don't think beyond the price, portion, taste, and ingredients. But for some, food is a matter of survival. For others, a meal is a social occasion, an indulgence. In a series of feature articles and photographs, this project explores the intersection of food, identity, and culture in a nuanced, personal way. The work includes five themes: fusion food, cuisine adaptation, international students cooking in America, ethnic markets, and family-owned restaurants and can be viewed at <http://somethingworthcookingfor.wordpress.com/>. Inspired by the author's experiences as a journalist, foodie, former restaurant and pastry chef apprentice, and international traveler, this capstone attempts to provide readers with a garnish of gastronomical insight: how what we eat, how we eat it, cook it, present it, and shop for it, can ultimately tell us what we value in our cultural identity and in life as a whole.



Adapting Cuisine | Something Worth Cooking For

By Farah Mohamed

WASHINGTON— When Praveendra K. Dhingra misses home he goes to Virginia. There awaits an Asian carryout place attached to a grocery store – Lotte Plaza – and he eats standing up with a rush of people, oil and spices reminiscent of his life in Delhi. Elsewhere in Virginia, Dhingra knows a place that sells fresh jalebis – the diabetically sweet orange syrupy fried Indian delicacies he himself used to sell when he co-owned an Indian restaurant in Falls Church.

But these indulgences only happen every six months, and more than he says his metabolism can afford. Even his menu at Rasoi Kitchen on K Street, one of two restaurants he now owns, has slowly steered away from the food that truly reminds him of home.

Ethnic restaurants in America must often alter recipes in order to cater to clientele tastes. While dishes are adapted to fit new palates, chefs are careful not to change too much. But some of the changes go beyond an ethnic restaurant in America; some changes are dictated by globalization.

As he sits in a booth at Rasoi Kitchen, Dhingra reminisces about the restaurant he once

owned. He eyes the gods and goddesses decorating the green wall behind him.

“The thing is, when you go to three-star, four-star places in India, they are all Americanized so to speak, so you’re kinda emulating that,” he says. “You’re giving them the Indian food, but because the Americans are half British, they are used to the European thing. They are comfortable in those, so you want to give that environment to them rather than make them sit in a jippi dhopri (worn out village huts).”

Dhingra says an owner tried out the hut style once and failed miserably. He doesn’t think even Indian clients here would want to revert back to something arguably primitive.

For Dhingra, who’s been in America some 20 years, altering the food isn’t the problem -- it’s economics. The nature of the recipes should be dictated by the desires of the customers, and because most customers aren’t Indian, Americanization seems natural.

“Why? Because this is universally acceptable,” he says.

For basic Indian food, you go to basic places, he says. “We’re not trying to give you our food in this place,” he adds. “If you are looking for tandoori chicken, you will get the tandoori chicken here. But, it won’t be as spicy – well done – like you get it over there when you’re standing right above the tandoor.”

To cater to his customers, Dhingra updated his menu, changed the way he prepares traditional dishes, took advice from blogs and chefs on the Internet and looked to the market for instructions.

In Falls Church, half of his clients were Indian and so it made economic sense to invest in time-consuming dishes like jalebi. In Washington, he said, clients tend to not know about these dishes, and apart from special occasions, the need to offer them – and the kitchen space – is not often there.

When he split from his partner and became the owner of Mehak and Rasoi, Dhingra made gradual but significant changes.

A traditional South Indian thali, a multiple course meal typically served in small bowls on a round tray, soon evolved into a lunch buffet with fruit salad. Spicy dishes were made milder with the addition of heavy cream and supplemented with cashew-paste to sustain the right color. Vegan and Jain menus were added to accommodate specific diets.

And he’s still changing.

“We keep adding things to it every year,” Dhingra says. “Adding and deleting. We keep experimenting with what is being popular.”

But Dhingra is careful not to make too many changes. Like the traditional swing and gods that adorn his modern restaurant walls at Rasoi, he’s careful that the food he serves still

resonates.

“The idea is to make it convenient for the customer,” he says. “We don’t use as much red chili powder as we do back home, but it’s still flavorful because we add everything else.”

Appearance of a dish, he said, is also important. The changes go beyond taste.

“You want to have similar looks without having the heaviness or without having the cream because people are familiar with that, so you don’t want to scare them or give them something that looks different,” Dhingra says.

In addition to globalization and a desire for healthier eating, the market has also shaped Rasoi’s menu.

“We used to put the black cardamom and all kinds of spices in our rice,” he says. “We can’t afford to do black cardamom anymore. We just go with green cardamom now. So the economy drives the recipe also.”

At The Afghan Grill in Woodley Park, owner Habib Noori faces a similar problem: meat in America is not the same as back in his hometown of Kabul, and even when he finds something similar – like organic meat at Whole Foods – it’s far too expensive to use in the restaurant business.

Noori, however, doesn’t face the same amount of pressure to alter the food as someone like Dhingra does because he sees Afghan food as less spicy than Indian and Pakistani food.

But Noori’s youngest son and occasional waiter at the Afghan Grill, 21-year-old Jahid, views the nuances differently.

“In Afghanistan, the food is more original and it has much more flavor and seasoning to it, but we just have to Americanize it ‘cause of the community that we live around,” Jahid says. “But Afghanistan’s food is very good . . . so for Afghan food we have to de-spice it.”

For Jahid, these changes and the influx of American clients are positive.

“It actually makes me more open-minded of my culture just seeing how a lot of people come by and try our food,” he says. “They always ask – we serve wine and stuff there – so it makes me more open-minded, I think.”

Perhaps it’s a generational difference that allows Jahid, born and raised in America, and Dhingra’s own children to view “their” cuisine so differently from their parents.

Dhingra frequently eats his restaurant food but prefers to eat simpler food when he goes home. If he treats himself, he’d rather be eating the greasy stuff standing up in lines in

Virginia.

But he isn't sure if even that form of Indian food still reflects "true" Indian food anymore. He hasn't lived in India for 20 years and separation has made him question his view of authenticity.

"I don't know what is home now," he says wistfully. "I spend more time over here. My kids are born here. They tell me, 'We are American, so don't you tell me I have to eat Indian food.'"



International Students | Something Worth Cooking For

By Farah Mohamed

WASHINGTON – Shenshu Pan dipped a spoon into her prepared sauce, licked it and sighed. The amount of salt didn't match the measurements on her Chinese cooking app, and she never had to add so much salt back home to attain the right taste.

Pan had invited an elderly lady she'd met on the bus to join her for an afternoon meal, and she worried her attempt to create authentic dishes would fall short.

Now a second semester graduate student at American University, Pan came to America from China with limited cooking experience.

"Maybe my cooking was zero," Pan said. "I didn't cook the dishes. Or maybe helped my parents to prepare the materials."

"It is actually not that hard," she added. "As long as you have the materials, the ingredients, you just can cook."

The only problem? Ingredient scarcity.

“I just came there and found that they sell some things from Asian parts, but there’s not enough authentic Chinese things . . .so I just bought some similar ingredients that I can use,” she said, describing her first American grocery shopping experience.

New in their home and perhaps new to cooking for themselves, international students in America grapple with how to find nourishment in a way that isn't so foreign. They compromise and adapt when ingredients aren't available or when ethnic stores are too far. And they invite friends over to compensate for the lack of family. For some, it's enough, and for others, the reality has sunk in: homemade cooking isn't the same without mom.

Rhucha Samudra, a first year doctoral student at AU from India, has found the emotional comfort she gets from her hybrid homemade dishes more rewarding than the satisfaction of perfectly replicating them.

Like Pan, Samudra was not a big cook until she came to America.

“I was alone and there was no one else going to cook for me,” Samudra said. “And I realized how much I enjoy it . . . that my style of cooking and the way I cook is so much ingrained in the way my mom, my grandmom cook.”

Many of the spices she needs for cooking she’s brought with her or found at Whole Foods, but not everything is easily accessible.

“There is stuff that you won’t really find unless you go to Indian stores,” Samudra said.

Most Indian stores are out in Virginia and Maryland, she said, and sometimes even they don’t have the spice mixture she needs. But she adjusts.

“You know the taste, you can see the difference, but it’s not terrible,” she said. “It’s fine. You do what you can do with whatever you have at that time.”

When Samudra wasn’t living with a host family, she would invite people to eat to emulate life in India. But there remained a disconnect: the cooking wasn’t her mother’s cooking, and the people were not her family.

“It’s not just about what you are cooking and the ingredients,” Samudra said. “It’s about the whole experience. You are with your family. And yeah, it’s different. Of course it’s different.”

Because she can’t invite guests frequently at her host family home, Samudra has found other ways to alleviate her nostalgia.

Whenever she cooks, she cooks Indian food.

“You just don’t go buy hamburger and warm it up and then eat it,” Samudra said. “It’s not the

food. It might be your get-go, but doing stuff from scratch, chopping vegetables, marinating stuff, or even using pressure cooker – that’s food.”

“I know how to make other Indian cuisines or other international cuisines, but when I get up in the morning, I make chai and that’s who I am,” Samudra added. “I don’t – I can’t have coffee in the morning. Chai. And the one with ginger and boiling and all that. So I realized that even the smallest things are so culturally important to you.”

When Pan started school, she ate sandwiches for a month. Then she met some other Chinese students and they learned from each other, she said.

It was hardest for them during Chinese New Year when friends uploaded pictures of food. “You felt a bit hurt,” Pan said. “You would just feel a bit disappointed.”

Senem Bakar, associate director for exchange visitors and student services at AU’s International Student and Scholar Services office, noticed the trend in homesickness in 2008 when she began a cookbook with international students called *Tales of Taste*.

“I think when it becomes a problem or subject for conversation is when there are special times in this culture – like the Thanksgiving time,” Bakar said of international students’ problems with cooking. “And then homesickness kicks in and that’s when you start craving more for a dish.”

Bakar recalls one Central Asian student who brought spices from home so that she could continue to cook familiar food. That, going to Virginia and Maryland, or finding a substitute are what international students tend to do, she said.

But even then Bakar said, it’s never actually the same.

“Finding the ingredient and making the dish is one thing, or having mom make it and you eat it is a different thing,” she said.

“Sometimes for instance, I try to replicate what my mom used to make, and I know that it’s not even similar but in my mind, that’s what I’m making,” Bakar added. “It doesn’t matter if it is the same taste or not. There is that emotional thing; there is that psychological thing. We’ve learned to adjust our expectations, I guess. That’s a big thing, and I think that applies to everybody that is living outside their own culture.”

Pan assembles the last of her four dishes: chicken wings with coca cola sauce. Her nerves have died down, and her guest is transfixed by the coke boiling down in the wok.

Pan struggles to put everything on the table, realizing she’s lacking in serving dishes. She brings plastic cutlery and a pair of chopsticks and uses little plastic spoons as serving spoons.

She apologizes to the lady, who doesn’t seem to mind. “It’s student life,” she says. “You do what you need to do. No shame in that.”



Ethnic Market | Something Worth Cooking For

By Farah Mohamed

As Frederick Ali Lotfian and his daughter Rocsanna peruse the aisles of Yekta Supermarket in Rockville, the pair disagree over what's Persian. Frederick Ali is determined to teach the non-Iranians in the Iranian and Middle Eastern store all about his culture, but Rocsanna chimes in, correcting him.

"This," Frederick Ali says holding up a bulb of garlic triumphantly in the air, "is something very Iranian. It's —"

"No, Baba, everyone uses that," says Rocsanna, shaking her head at him. "It's garlic."

"Yes, garlic. Everyone uses it, but the Persians, they use it a lot!" says her father, fighting back.

The Lotfians have been coming to Yekta for about five years. Rocsanna cherishes the visits, especially because of her strong affinity to Persian cuisine.

"We feel like we're in our country when we come here," she says. "I mean, 'cause you figure out more different stuff when you go to Korean stores. You're like, 'Oh, what is this?' We already know basically what everything is in here."

Ethnic markets offer a way for immigrants to stay culturally connected. They're a one-stop shop for items reminiscent of home. And they're also a place for those interested in international cuisine to learn, shop and get immersed.

Shenshu Pan, a Chinese graduate student at American University, finds that shopping at an ethnic grocery store changes the shopping dynamic. She and other Chinese students have found comfort – and authentic ingredients – in their occasional visits to the Great Wall Supermarket in Maryland.

“When we went there, we really felt like we had just come back to home,” Pan says. “All people are Chinese people and we can see that food for ingredients just like you saw in China in one of the supermarkets. So I was really excited. Finally we can buy the things like we used to before.”

It was this same sentiment that prompted the late Yadi Dadras to open Yekta in 1979. After working with his grocer uncle in Tehran, Dadras had envisioned a similar place in America for Iranian immigrants.

Farsi newspapers and magazines sit on a shelf near the entrance. A TV screen -- muted – shows Iranian programming while Kesha and Taylor Swift play on the loud speakers. Fruit, nuts, nougat and pastries line shelves and counters in boxes and bowls beneath permanent Christmas lights. Closer to the back, there's an intricately decorated “Yekta” sign, a framed picture of the owner and an American flag.

The initial store was small, about a quarter of its current size, says Sahel Dadras, the late owner's daughter, who now helps run the place. It was difficult at first because many of the products her father wanted to carry in the 1980s were not easily accessible. There were no other Middle Eastern imported grocery stores then, she says.

“I try to carry things that no one else has,” Dadras says. “I try to bring things that are familiar to people of all backgrounds, so I hope that I have something that a 7-11 does not . . . I try to bring unique fruits and vegetables and so forth like that, just to trigger that – that home feeling is what we really try to do here.”

“The way I see it, to a lot of people, this is a toy store for grown-ups,” Dadras adds. “. . . Smelling a certain smell, seeing a certain thing brings back a certain – it's not just about hunger or eating, it's more about that memory of what you have when you were back home in your own country.”

But like many “ethnic” stores, the clientele is diverse. The market even brands itself as a carrier of “exotic and unusual foods from around the world,” on its website.

“Ten years ago if you would've asked, I would have said it's about 70 to 25 percent,” Dadras says. “Seventy percent being the Iranians. Now we're about 50-50. We have

many different Americans. We have Russians. Israelis. We have all backgrounds. Pakistanis. Indians. Any background. It's not limited anymore to just the Persians."

Kathleen Meredith, a Chevy Chase resident says she found out about Yekta through a friend. Meredith makes trips out to Rockville whenever she needs special ingredients to satisfy her "binge of Moroccan cooking."

Neighboring Rockville markets like the Maryland International Mart and Dana Bazaar are smaller than Yekta, but the mix of products is the same: spiky fruits, dillweed water and powdered concoctions only natives would know to look for, and more generic items for those interested in cooking a cuisine-specific dish.

As the Lotfians walk around, Rocsanna spouts off favorite dishes. After rejecting an offer of yogurt soda from her father (she prefers the non-carbonated Ayrān yogurt drink), she makes her way to the frozen food section, eyeing the stews behind the sliding doors. That's when her Persian gastronomical pride kicks in.

"I mostly eat Iranian food," Rocsanna says. "I'm like so used to it. American food is just like a copy of Italian and all that, right? I mean, I don't know. I don't eat hamburgers that much. Because they try to avoid junk food – Iranians. You wouldn't find as many obese people as there are in America right now."

She laughs. "But it's a lot of work – our food."



Fusion Food | Something Worth Cooking For

By Farah Mohamed

When he first left India to work on cruise lines, Santosh Tiptur ate nothing but bread, jam, yogurt and cereal. The young pastry chef probably didn't know he would become executive chef of the Washington-based chocolate boutique Co Co. Sala, but he did develop a knack for fusing flavors.

After studying pastry making in Bangalore, Tiptur spent 12 years in cruise lines on 26 different ships, exposed to a number of cultures, cuisines and chefs. There were seven menus on the cruise and each meal was different. Essentially, Tiptur said, it was fusion food.

"The French chefs would cook Vietnamese cuisine, so they would add a twist to it," he said. "When we were in Asia, we used to cook the Asian food because we want to give them (the tourists on the cruise) the Asian experience . . . But the food was prepared by French chefs or German chefs or Austrian chefs, and they added their own twist to it, so it was a fusion."

Fusion can be the literal fusing of cuisines, but it can also be more nuanced than that. It can mean varied cooking styles or the combination of less obviously complementary ingredients, and it can also be influenced by a chef's background. The term is more

complex than many realize and has earned a negative connotation of inauthenticity.

When he was eight, Santosh Tiptur would go to the market in India to shop for his mother's groceries. He had an eye for the freshest vegetables and a skill for spotting onion varieties. His mother experimented with dishes from other Indian regions, his uncle's friend taught him to bake cakes, and when his parents went out, Tiptur and his siblings tried new food.

But when he came to the United States, Tiptur found the American food he tried lacked flavor – or at least, the depth of flavor he was used to in India. At Co Co. Sala he uses his pastry background to amplify American staple dishes. There, one can find sliders, crab cakes, and mac and cheese in small portions packed with flavor.

His fusion of familiar formats and novel spices stemmed from his desire for a Washington niche.

“How will I change the way we produce the food here because there is burgers everywhere, there is pizzas everywhere, there is, you name it,” Tiptur said, recalling his thought process. “Italian restaurants, there is Greek restaurant. Everything is around, but we need to offer something different. So I said, my biggest strength is flavors so I will play with flavors. I will use the friendly dish, which the people around here are used to eat and transform it into a nice, flavorful dish with the touch of a pastry chef.”

With dishes like the Creole crab cake -- three cakes with mango salsa, avocado cilantro emulsion and chipotle chocolate tomato glaze -- and the beef tenderloin -- Meyer angus coated with gruyere and cocoa beans and served with a chocolate shiraz reduction, vegetables, and garlic and goat cheese potato puree -- the food is, as Tiptur likes to say, “a party in the mouth.” And there's one more level to this fusion: almost every dish has a little bit of chocolate in it.

A few blocks away at Zengo in Chinatown, chef de cuisine Graham Bartlett has a different idea of fusion.

Founded in 2005 and owned by Richard Sandoval, Zengo is marketed as “an artful blend of Latin-Asian styles and flavors.” The restaurant's press fact sheet says the word “Zengo,” which translates to “give and take,” “illustrat[es] the fusion of two unique cultures.”

But Bartlett thinks labeling the food as “fusion” isn't entirely accurate.

“Everybody calls it fusion, but I don't really like to call it that because it sounds like you're taking things that aren't meant to be together and forcing it,” Bartlett said. “We don't ever force anything. I think you naturally know when something's there and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work . . . We're building those flavors so I think that inherently it's already there. I mean whether it's acidity or tamarind or vinegar or whatever, we

balance that with fruit, so we never put anything that's really one-dimensional on the plate."

The ambiguity associated with the term "fusion" he said, is a source of confusion.

"Everyone thinks it's going to be something super spicy," Bartlett said. "They think we're going to do gobs and gobs of spices, but very seldom is it like that. We're going to balance it out somehow. Soften it down. The theory is that they all enhance each other and go hand in hand."

The other problem, Bartlett said, is what people mean when they say "fusion." Do they mean a flavor profile, or a cooking technique? The former could be forced, but the latter, he said, could be considered fusion.

Sometimes, though, the dish is unique enough to grab attention. He cites a candied tomato, a dish so counter-intuitive, it becomes a subject of interest. Other times, it's the reinvention of a dish that makes it different.

"Everybody has their own ways of looking at that one thing," Bartlett said. "If I go down the street and this guy is making mashed potatoes differently than I am, then the way he sees it might be completely different than the way I see it . . . of course there's certain ways of doing things traditionally, but I think in the modern way, it is organic and people have not liberties but tendencies to make things a little more – to lighten it up and have food be something fun and new and different and celebratory almost playful like bantering with the person that's eating it."

But fusion can also be a source of problems. At Co Co. Sala, Tiptur says he still gets customers asking for dishes without chocolate. Others see it as some kind of ignominious invasion of gastronomical tradition, a crusade for something lacking a definitive cultural home.

"A lot of people like myself might think that you're losing culture in some ways so it's probably a bad thing, Bartlett said. "But whether we like it or not, the world's becoming a smaller place I think and as a result, you see a lot of cultural things mashed together."

Bartlett points to New Orleans as an example of this. The food we once criticized, he said, is not the food we end up criticizing years later.

"Do you think people 200 years ago thought that that was a bad thing?" asked Bartlett of New Orleans' own 'fusion' food. "I doubt it. Now it's something that's revered and in its own right it's got its own identity. Maybe 200 years from now people will look at what we're doing and think that it's the normal."



Family-owned restaurants | Something Worth Cooking For **By Farah Mohamed**

WASHINGTON – As he walks the decorated salons of Bethesda’s Positano Ristorante, Jimmy Traettino pauses at a framed photo of his parents resting on a nearby shelf. The black and white portrait of the couple is worn from age, but its placement – and Traettino’s attention to it – convey its significance.

“I was 15 years old,” Traettino says, recalling the days when Positano first opened back in 1977. “I was a busboy, serving bread and water, cleaning the toilets and bathrooms, taking out the trash with my high school buddies.”

“I didn’t choose it, but it was my family’s business,” he adds. “It’s like our home, so when people come in, they’re in my house. I take care of them like they’re my guests in my house. And I also happen to make money doing that.”

A family-owned restaurant is unique not just because the family works together, but also because family values are instilled in the business. Workers and guests are treated like family even after they leave, and even when things don't work out.

The Dadras family of Rockville’s Yekta Kabobi Restaurant eats at their family-owned

place everyday, and they and the long-time staff work the tables and kitchen together.

“We are very hands-on, so we’re 100 percent involved,” said owner Sahel Dadras. “These guys have been trained by my mother, and my chef has been with me for 18 years. My other kitchen staff has been with me for no less than 10 years. So we are very much all like family and everything is influenced from what my parents have known.”

It’s a mixed experience working in a family-owned place, she said. Harder sometimes, but ultimately rewarding.

“Life is difficult,” she said. “You know, in any sense. You’re living and working with someone and being so close to family it becomes a little tricky, but you know, we have I think found a very good balance and we kind of do everything all together . . .if anything, it has brought us closer together.”

But being family-owned doesn’t necessitate close family experiences. Sometimes the dynamic is more complex.

Habib Noori of the Afghan Grill has had a different experience. Initially the Woodley Park restaurant was family-owned, and his two sons, Jahid and Zahid -- now 21 and 22 -- would help out with the tables.

But Noori found that the negatives overshadowed the positives of the experience. His sons, he said, thought he was too strict.

Despite abandoning the label of “family-owned,” the Afghan Grill still appears homey. Noori serves all the food himself, checks on his guests and makes sure to show them out, closing the door gently behind them.

Jimmy Traettino recalls the family endeavor of opening Positano.

“My mom and dad got a loan from a bank across the street . . .and they opened up an Italian restaurant with 80 seats called Positano because our ancestors came from Positano, Italy,” he says. “And we had a line out the door because Americans had never eaten such incredible real homemade Italian food before. Just like your mom makes the best food, my mom makes the best food.”

The Traettino’s brought culture to Positano, marrying familiar Italian regions in cuisine and decor. The group of buildings that constitute Positano resemble a quaint village. With terracotta floors, grape vines, a gelato cart, murals, a garden terrace and Venetian masks – it’s a little taste of the Amalfi Coast with sections that stay true, Traettino says, to both parents’ Italian upbringing. There’s also a family crest: a white dragon and a black dragon.

Traettino’s father grew up near Naples and his mother, Angela, came from a little town outside Venice. After feeding their Bethesda neighbors, they realized opening a

restaurant would be a way to earn money from what they were already doing.

His mother learned to cook early. Growing up during the Second World War, she was tasked with baking the daily bread. That meant using available resources to feed 40 people.

Traettino's father grew up in wartime with 12 siblings. They had a tradition there, said Traettino. Anyone who had a house with a woman who could cook would rent out the downstairs rooms and feed guests. It was, he said, like growing up in a tavern.

Today, Traettino, a self-proclaimed "chief everything officer," runs Positano. His parents live close-by and walk there on the weekends and his son -- now a senior at Walt Whitman High School -- helps out occasionally once he's done with homework.

"He's been here since he was four hours old," says Traettino of his son. "He grew up in this place. To him it's not a job, it's like being in at his second home."

Positano guests also develop a familial relationship with Traettino. One couple -- a writer and his wife -- come directly from the airport whenever the husband returns from Italy. Traettino knows their order by heart: a shared meal of pasta fagioli soup, a house salad, spaghetti with tomato sauce and a basket of bread.

He attributes the customer intimacy to the fact that Positano is family-owned.

"I think a family-owned restaurant has more care and attention because it is like our home," he said. "Throughout the day, we give a lot away to our guests. We do have a menu with prices. This is a business. We do need to make a profit. But we're very generous with our portions . . . Regular customers here invariably are going to eat for free just on a spontaneous 'oh that's on the house.'"

And then there's the staff.

Positano has staff that have worked for 20, sometimes 25 years.

"We've gathered around the people who work with us who feel that they've become part of the family," said Traettino.

He also helps out past employees and tries to give anyone a chance. One guy, Antonio the dishwasher, left to make it big at another restaurant. When it didn't work out, he came back to earn some money. Traettino took him in.

But Traettino admits that there are downsides to owning a family business.

"Everyone has a voice," he said. "It's like a Greek democracy. Then sometimes people yell. Sometimes for many many many moons nothing gets done because there are five people saying opposite things. That's a disadvantage... But that's running a family

business.”