

DINING

Renovations enhance Cafe Cortina's elegance

BY RENEE SNOGLUND
SPECIAL WRITER

Cafe Cortina's warm, inviting elegance entices you to linger a long, long time over that last glass of wine or cup of cappuccino.

Maybe it's the interior's rich shades of russet and deep honey or the flickering glow from the fireplace. Maybe it's the personal attention afforded each guest by owner Rina Tonon and her son, Adrian. Certainly it's the satisfaction of having enjoyed some superbly prepared Italian cuisine.

"We're here to create wonderful food. We're here to create worthy memories," said Rina, whose personal touch is evident everywhere in the restaurant.

Recent renovations include an outdoor summer terrace. The main dining and fire-side rooms were also renovated.

"We opened the restaurant up a little more by adding some windows and raising the ceilings, but retained the intimacy of the restaurant," said Rina.

"All the wood has been changed to a warm cherry wood. We've also redone the bar. We considered expanding the bar, but it wasn't part of the restaurant's personality so we just maintained the look that Cafe Cortina has always had. For us, it's like a natural hospitality. We're comfortable with what we do

here, to cook, to take care," Rina and her husband, Adriano, who passed away a few years ago, always dreamed of opening their own restaurant.

"We used to go to Europe for six months in our younger years. We visited the small restaurants and talked to the owners. We always said we'd have our own restaurant with our own gardens," she said.

Nineteen years ago Cafe Cortina opened on land once covered with apple orchards. True to the Tonon's dreams, it was a wonderful spot for a restaurant and garden. In the summer, the garden supplies their kitchen with an abundance of radicchio and arugula, plus lots of basil for sauces and pesto.

Although all three dining rooms have a genuine intimacy, the heart of Cafe Cortina lies in its kitchen. Chef Vincenzo Bassonetti, who has cooked in Italy, Switzerland, New York and Texas, does marvelous things with pasta, veal and seafood.

"I like to do classic dishes like osso buco, a veal shank. You have to know how to add the wine. That's art," he said.

"There's such a good rapport between me and Vincenzo on the dishes, because the dishes I had during childhood he makes," said Rina. "He has a style of his own, but the dishes he prepares are from his back-



Casual elegance: Rina Tonon and her son, Adrian, and Chef Vincenzo Bassonetti at Cafe Cortina. At the table behind them are customers Bob Ryan and Ed Kelly.

ground. He cooks with his heart and soul. He's a perfectionist in Italian cooking.

Young Adrian, 23, who lovingly tends the garden besides acting as host, already is a sea-

soned restaurateur. "I've cooked since I was little," he said. "You have to love this business. It has to be a passion."

Ron Riedel and Mark Hilla, business associates in Medusa

Cement Co. in Farmington Hills, are frequent guests at Cafe Cortina. Their loyalty is based on the graciousness of the Tonon family as well as the excellent cuisine.

Cafe Cortina

- WHERE: 30715 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (810) 474-3033
- ATMOSPHERE: Romantic, casual elegance
- MENU: Homestyle Italian at its best
- PRICES: High moderate to expensive
- SEATING CAPACITY: 180
- HOURS: Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday, 5-10 p.m.; Sunday, private parties only
- ATTIRE: Upscale casual
- CREDIT CARDS: All majors accepted

"I'm probably here three times a week for lunch. It's the food, the cordialness of the people here. I don't think I've ever ordered off the menu. I ask them what they have. They always accommodate me," said Riedel. About his whitefish with Siciliano sauce, he sighed "Ahh, excellent."

Hilla, who dined on veal prepared with white wine, lemon and garlic, said, "It was the best. I think the ambience is terrific and the personal touch is just perfect, with Rina and Adriano coming around. There's nothing phony about this."

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, *Coverage & Entertainment*, 30231 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313) 591-7279.

Appointments

Chef Louis Fuman, renowned for his New Orleans Creole cuisine, has found a new home at Norman's Elton Street Station, 245 S. Elton Street in Birmingham (corner of East Maple and Elton). Restaurant owners Norman and Bonnie LePage, Chef Louis and new general manager Dan Linnen are seeking to create a harmonious ambience between the menu, the surroundings, guests and staff. Fresh fish and seafood, steaks, pastas, salads, burgers and ribs will remain popular mainstays on Norman's menu. Look for daily specials, and gradual change with the "Big Bang" taking place around Mardi Gras time. (810) 647-7774

Events

Somerset Collection

WORS presents Brunch with the Classics noon to 1:30 p.m. Sundays at The Somerset Collection Rotunda, corner of Big Beaver and Colledge roads in Troy. Brunch prepared by Sebastian's Grill. Cost \$25 per person. Net proceeds benefit the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra. Call for reservations. (810) 643-7440

Key Largo

The Men of Key Largo in Villed Lake are presenting a Politically Incorrect Dinner, 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 9. Dinner will include cognac, selected wines, Cuban cigars, and special dinner, which features a prime 24 ounce Black Angus Strip Steak with mushrooms. Cost \$95 per person, dress casual, but elegant. Limited seating, call for reservations.

(810) 360-0670 or (810) 669-1441

Unique Restaurant Corporation

Special feast celebrating California. The five course "earthquake of flavor" will be held at America (Royal Oak) (810) 549-2000, Nov. 9; and Sebastian's Grill (Troy) (810) 649-6025, Nov. 11. Cost is \$38.95 per person, not including tax and gratuity. Call for reservations.

College restaurants

Oakland Community College
Wassail Feast Thursday, Nov. 30. The college is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. (810) 471-7780

American Harvest Restaurant (Schoolcraft)

International Dinner Buffet 6-7:45 p.m. Wednesdays at Ameri-

can Harvest Restaurant on campus, 16600 Haggerty Road. Cost \$15.95-\$19.95 per person. Reservations recommended. The restaurant is open for lunch noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday-Friday. The Culinary Arts Department prepares a Gourmet Breakfast Buffet 7:30-9 a.m. Thursdays through Dec. 14. The cost is \$3.75 per person. Reservations are not necessary. (313) 462-4488

Madrigal Dinners

Schoolcraft College is accepting reservations for its 19th annual Madrigal Dinners 7:30 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Dec. 7-9 in the College's Waterman Center. Return to the 16th century and dine on Elizabethan fare, and enjoy special "period" entertainment. Cost \$35 per person; tables seat eight. (313) 462-4417

10th Anniversary

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FEB. 21	NEW YORK	7:30 PM
MAR. 17	DENVER	12:00 PM
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APR. 14	BOSTON	7:00 PM

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