



Mondo - Diego Pignatelli. Mediterra Restaurant Bangkok, kind and polite manners put at the disposal of the search for Beauty

Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 16 apr 2022 (Prima Notizia 24) The deus ex machina of one of the most quoted restaurants of Italian Cuisine in Bangkok, tells us about the importance of cultural openness towards the world but also of respect for one's own historical roots.

Diego Pignatelli, 41 years old, just turned, welcomes you with polite and kind manners, a reluctance perhaps dictated by shyness but certainly greatly occupied by a professionalism that, in his words, in the story of his existential and work experience, reveals a particular dedication, a real mission. A trait that pervades the entire arc of his training and the various tasks carried out in the field of hotel reception, customer service to cover the entire range of professional figures that revolve around the restaurant industry. Born in Belgium to parents from Grottaglie, Apulia, who emigrated to Belgium, an older brother of 4 years old, who lives in Brussels and works as a photographer, explains the different mentality and cultural openness that is achieved by following the Belgian school cursus. How did the period of education in Belgium influence the cosmopolitan way of looking at things in the world? In Belgium, middle school includes high school for a total of seven years before entering what in Italy is called "Liceo". Above all, in my personal case, having parental figures who revolved around the workings of the European Union, I found myself from a very young age confronted with a culture resulting from the fusion and coexistence of various languages and various origins. Although my mother tongue is Italian, I began to speak French, English and other languages at a very early age. The European School I attended was - and still is - a huge school complex, including schools ranging from Primary, through High School and covering the arc of Education before University. I became aware of the different cultural perspective that is achieved over time, when I returned to Apulia periodically for vacations or when I was close to the majority of the family that still lives there, talking with my lifelong friends, I verified the progression of the opening of my cultural perspective acquired while my friends and those of my generation living in Italy and in Apulia were rather constant, a bit 'still, without particular development or advancement of critical spirit towards a set of values, of rights, which in Italy are not adequately cultivated. Belgium, due to its geographical and I would say geopolitical location, is in a privileged position, it is easy to reach Paris, like London or Germany, Switzerland, you can feel their "closeness" not only in a physical or territorial sense but also in a cultural sense, in terms of influences and constant comparison. Then there was the period of entering the job with all the amount of experience gradually accumulated, right? First there was a transition into academia. I have always had a particular passion for Chemistry when I was a student and for Mechanics and everything related to it. So, I decided to enroll in the University, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, at the

Polytechnic of Turin. It was an educational path that would make my parents happy. I passed the Admission Examination -1,800 applications for 100 available places-but during my initial studies, I realized that learning mathematical language in Belgium, with an Italian teacher who taught at the European School was stagnant and his personal approach was - on balance- limited. While as far as Chemistry was concerned I felt to be much more at ease. It was the period in which in Turin, I frequented Italian Hip-Hop community, a culture and music genre that have always inspired and attracted me. Even today I still produce Hip-hop in my (little) free time. In my third year of University, I realized that this could no longer be my path. I confronted with my parents, it seemed unfair for me to continue to commit them economically to a path that was no longer convincing. I returned to Belgium, where I studied Hotel Management at the Hotel Institute and in three years I obtained my Bachelor Degree. Now it was a matter of giving substance to this new professional aspect of my life. I had the chance to work with the Rocco Forte Group in Brussels and briefly in London, an opportunity that I took, of course. At the same time, an important job offer came to me from Rome, from the Hassler Hotel, a very relevant and important opportunity, moreover in Italy and in the city I had long dreamed of. A unique opportunity. Wasn't it? Yes, it was a very special and high-level opportunity. I was able to gain the trust of the owner of the Roman office, as well as empathize with the employees of every level and role at that location, people who had worked there for decades and had become a kind of family. Initially, my position was that of events curator, a strategic role that allowed me to touch all departments of the historic hotel, to absorb the passion and experience of the professionals I worked with on a daily basis but also to put my creativity to good use, discover the value of discipline and the pleasure of excellence. I also had the good fortune to meet legendary personalities from the world of catering, politics, cinema and international showbiz. Over time I worked in other jobs, it was a real professional "school" conducted in the field and at levels of absolute prestige. How did you come to work in Asia and specifically in Bangkok? In 2008 I moved to Thailand after accepting an offer for the role of manager in a resort in Koh Samui. Then, the experience of a restaurant of my own was born, a dream - until then - always kept in the drawer, in the Thai capital, Lo Sfizio, located in a strategic position in the metropolitan fabric of Bangkok, had gained fame with an important community of regular customers who appreciated the simplicity, authenticity and friendly and welcoming service. One of them, in particular, CEO of a famous bank was a frequent visitor and also brought colleagues, associates, counterparts from other banks and financial institutions. After five years, following my ambition to open a bigger restaurant with a concept close to my own culture, I decided to close. This client of mine was impressed by my decision and spontaneously suggested that we open a restaurant together, trusting my skills in the field of Food & Beverage, which he had been able to verify in five years of attendance. We became partners and that's how Mediterra Restaurant Bangkok was born. What is the philosophy behind Mediterra? At the beginning of Mediterra's operations, my partner and I took a trip together to my homeland, Puglia, and then toured the length and breadth of Sicily. It was not only a tour but also a real cultural journey in what is my perspective at the base of Mediterra: the respect of the food of Southern Italy, of their traditions, of their ancient spirit, even if revisited in the presentation, in the setting, in the layout. The same is true for wines: I

myself provide information about the history and genesis of some of the wines I have chosen to serve to my clients, diversifying the spectrum of knowledge compared to the pre-existing ones here in Thailand and especially in Bangkok. The same criterion for the choice of liqueurs, limoncello, bitters, grappa, the same for the coffee that I have carefully researched and identified in respect of the flavors of our province, the tradition of southern Italian coffee. The same physical structure of the building that houses Mediterra, which was previously a Japanese restaurant, today is a corner of the Mediterranean transferred to Bangkok, the white of the lime on the exterior walls, the colored tiles that depict the traditional craftsmanship of Sicily. The plants that adorn Mediterra come -in part- from Spain, olive trees, cacti, succulent plants, in two days green designers and local gardeners have set up everything and contributed to the creation of a Mediterranean oasis, its warmth and its historical roots in the Thai capital, a vast and cosmopolitan city also proud of its roots and its cultural heritage. Mediterra Restaurant Bangkok, n.14, Soi Sukhumvit 23 (Prasanmit) Bangkok 10110 Tel. 02115776

di Francesco Tortora Sabato 16 Aprile 2022