



Mondo - Bangkok: the experience of Edoardo Bonavolta, chef by profession, with an eye toward green and "plant based" vistas

Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 19 ott 2022 (Prima Notizia 24) Edoardo Bonavolta, who came to Thailand almost by accident, is now a chef at a major venue typical of Bangkok's metropolitan life, Gigi Café, a stylish and avant-garde hotspot, and is also in charge of Gigi Dining Hall.

At the top of the wood and steel staircase that leads to the upper floor of the Gigi Café location, Edoardo Bonavolta is waiting for us, a lusty physique, sporty and youthful appearance, he greets us with an "Americano" coffee, next to his computer, a necessary and fundamental tool for his work. He is 42 years old but surprises with his look for which -in all honesty- you would give him 34-35 years at most. Just outside the café, the hubbub of Sukhumvit District traffic reigns, near the Asoke stop of the BTS skytrain line. The entrance to Gigi Cafe is something of a stargate, outside the peculiar mixture of tradition and modernity, typical of Bangkok, inside, a lounge atmosphere, relaxed and populated by an à la page, refined, very youthful, cosmopolitan clientele. You are originally from San Vincenzo, in the Province of Livorno. But how did you come to the decision to live and work in Thailand? I have been living permanently in Thailand for fourteen years now, only now realizing how quickly time passes. Actually, I arrived here quite randomly. I was living in Tuscany, a rather clear present and future ahead of me, I had opened a wine shop/wine bar in Suvereto, and everything seemed to be running in that direction by now. I, in truth, was never driven by a spirit marked by stability. I studied political science at university, actively participated in life as a militant in the Left, helping to organize events, conferences, social and political action groups, it was a time in my life when anything could have happened to me, anything could have happened. I have always cooked, if we want to find a stretch of continuity in my personal experience but my interests, as I mentioned, have long been held in the shadow of a social and political passion. Then, one day, a friend of mine mentions to me about projects related to the promotion of Italian products in the Food & Beverage sector and -specifically- to focus this in Thailand. For me it was a very interesting proposal and in an exotic place, far from the usual tourist and cultural routes of my generation, almost going to see on the world map where exactly it was. It was 2018, in December, I made the decision to take that opportunity and make that project my own. What did you feel when you arrived -24 years ago- in Thailand, especially in Bangkok? I was struck first of all by the air you breathe here, the atmosphere. I was surprised by the sidewalks, disjointed, with unevenness, broken in many places. And then suddenly to be in countryside so distant-in form and space/time dimension-from the metropolitan context, a very strange mix. Two worlds so different yet coexisting side by side and constituting the unity that is Thailand.

The smiling faces of the Thais, their manner of bearing, always so familiar, colorful and -apparently- full of willingness in welcoming you. Then, in time, you learn to discern what is from what appears, when it is pure affectation or true welcome, warm, humane made up of good feelings without expectation in any gainsaying. Through the accounts of the professional and human experiences of those who have decided to move to Thailand, there is evidence of great pioneering work in various areas of production as well as the arts and culture in the broadest sense. What are your plans in your personal future? Today I am Chef in this location that already has its own personality and recognizable imprint in the Bangkok lifestyle scenario. I also take an interest in Gigi Dining Hall in Sukhumvit 45. This allows me and has allowed me to leverage my personal know-how in the field of dining, Italian wines, which, in recent times, are increasingly conquering the Thai domestic market and the city of Bangkok, especially. This is an experience that will allow me to have a practically daily test also in the field of cafeteria, in dealing with customers-local and international-with the Thai working world, a complex machine, characterized by regulations that one has to know how to handle carefully, and then there is also an additional implication, in terms of complexity, due to personnel management. In Thailand there is a lot of turnover, staff often change jobs and even types of jobs, several times, in their lives, it is a specific characteristic of the Thai workforce, you have to be prepared in these areas and be able to catch the wave of change at any point or stage in the production chain. My personal plan is to -someday- devote myself more fully to my own already established entrepreneurial business in the "Plant Based" food sector, I am very interested in the vegan cheese scene and vegan food more generally, such as vegan burgers, etc. "Plant Based" catering already has illustrious precedents that have been active for years here in Bangkok, there are many vegan businesses in the catering field, and they are proof that, in this respect as well, a great deal of pioneering work has been and is being done in making a space for itself in a Nation where food is heavily revolving around the processing and consumption of animal meat.

di Francesco Tortora Mercoledì 19 Ottobre 2022