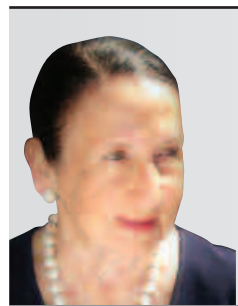
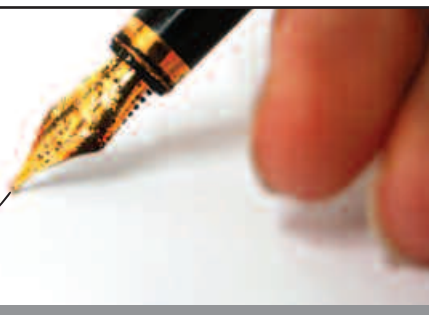


## Lifestyle &amp; Culture



Marie D.

Diary



## Food transformed as Art at Picasso restaurant

**M**y latest discovery in the local world of food is the Italian restaurant *Picasso* which is to be found at Tigné Point. It is predicable for me to say that it has beautiful views of Valletta. Like older women, at night, the view looks better than in the daytime for its rough edges are muted and bathed by moonlight.

The occasion was another convivial evening organised for members by the indefatigable and enthusiastic delegate of the local *Accademia Italiana Della Cucina*, Massimiliana Tomaselli, who has been leading it for the last ten years.

The theme that evening in late May was *Gabriele D'Annunzio a Malta* and we were also celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Picasso in 1983, after who the restaurant was named.

The Master (should one say Mistress perhaps?) of Ceremonies, her bell by her side and ready for action, pointed out that the *Accademia* is a cultural institution concerned with good food but that its main concern was "La Civiltà della tavola" the Art of the Table.

To support what she had already said, that these evenings were not only about good food but the culture of the table, on the menu were printed two poems: D'Annunzio's *I Pastori* in which he laments: "Ah perché non son io cò miei pastori?".

Marino Egisto Paolucci a very active member of the *Accademia* told us he had dreamed of a poem, *I Pescatori*, and during the evening he read it to the diners in his own dramatic way. This too was printed on the back of the menu. The Ukrainian violinist gave us more culture with some classical pieces. I mentally approved the choice. Music I love, not some recently composed gibberish.

Massimiliana did not allow the name of the restaurant to pass her by and gave the diners an excellent analysis of the work of Picasso and his enormous contribution to Art because "the *Accademia* never loses an occasion to create culture round food. After all the journey of an artist is in many ways similar to that of a good chef. Each dining experience is different and unrepeatable and each dish is never the same as the one created before or indeed after it."



A group photo of diners just before the evening came to an end



The poet and young man about town Marino Egisto Paolucci, Chef Donatella Mastrogiacomo, Delegate of the Accademia Massimiliana Tomaselli and Samuele Mastrogiacomo

She went on to tell us that art has contributed greatly to the world of food. Consider how many paintings, including those of Picasso have food as their main subject; market and kitchen scenes have been painted by artists throughout the ages; bowls of fruit; baskets of vegetables.

Picasso loved painting fish and some of his ceramic creations have fish as their subject. She commented on Picasso's versatility and quotes him thus: "It took four years to paint like Raphael but a lifetime to paint like a child." She pointed out that a chef too, has to learn the classical way of cooking, to be a master of established dishes. It is only by having a good knowledge of the basics is he then able to innovate and create new dishes.

Massimiliana then referred to the Chef of Picasso, Donatella Mastrogiacomo, who had already received a Diploma di Buona Cucina from the *Accademia*. "She is an example of how



The diners sat facing each other

one 'grows' in a kitchen, said Massimiliana. "Donatella is an excellent cook of traditional dishes but eventually started experimenting and created her own dishes. We shall be sampling some of them this evening. I hope you will enjoy them."

I had been giving surreptitious glances at the menu in the meantime and finally, as Mas-



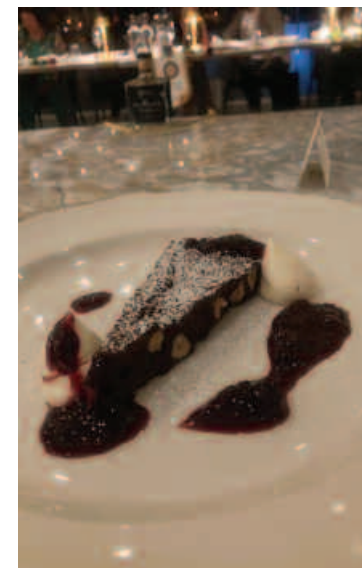
Our hardworking delegate, Massimiliana Tomaselli

*impressione*, as a dear Italian friend of ours used to say. I quietly enjoyed the other bits and pieces but skated round the dreaded *polpa*. My views on this dish were not shared by the other diners as they cleared their plates.

I enjoyed the next four dishes but particularly the *Risotto con capesante, Salicornia e purè di barbabietola*. I love scallops and barbabietola turned out to be nothing more exotic than beetroot.

I was delighted to see that there were no large fillets or steaks, Angus or otherwise and the ubiquitous beef tagliata and its pink flesh so loved by locals. I think I am almost vegetarian. I'll decide one of these days.

With a Portuguese son-in-law and many visits to lovely Portugal I am bound to love baccalà, although the dish I enjoyed that evening *Filetto di baccalà croccante* was not salted baccalà but fresh and beautifully presented.



My Brownie con nocciola Piemonte e mascarpone

I had waited excitedly for dessert: *Brownies con nocciola Piemonte e mascarpone*. This was a most generous helping and delicious to the last mouthful. By now, after all that food everyone had truly had more than enough, not forgetting the wines, of which many drank copiously. Ristorante Picasso was most generous.

We sipped coffee, while Chef Mastrogiacomo and her son Samuele, who is now taking over, were greeted by diners with enthusiasm and thanked for a most enjoyable evening of good food and culture.

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