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Native Intelligence



# The Magic

Visit a restaurant named for a Renaissance poet and savor this



# of Sorrento

city's feast for the senses. By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

## Native Intelligence

**P**assione! In order to make anything run, you need to have passion. Passion is the base of success," says Angelo Celentano, the man behind the magic of Ristorante Tasso and Pizzeria in Sorrento. Sorrento is the city of song, oranges and the tarantella – a festive, whirling dance. In Neapolitan dialect, Sorrento is spelled *Surriento*. Festive and bustling, it overlooks the Bay of Naples and attracts visitors from around the world for its food, music and culture.

Today I've taken my Vespa along the Strada 163, on the Amalfi Coast, just in time for pranzo (lunch) at Tasso. It is the crown jewel in the restaurant mecca of Campania.

In summer, fiori di zucca (squash flowers) are on the menu!

Fiori di zucca, piccole pizzette, and arancini arrive at my table. The teaser Neapolitan appetizer, a trio of delicately flash-fried squash flowers, small rounds of mini pizza and golden rice balls spiked with peas, is enough to inspire any food lover's appetite. Seasonal foods, prepared by executive hands, keep a mare nostrum theme on the menu. Brick oven pizza; handmade pasta with fish, eggplant, pumpkin or squash; fish any way you like it – grilled, sautéed, flash-fried or baked – prime cuts of filetto, pork, lamb and veal; and exquisite desserts like tiramisu and baba rum are just a sample of regional food on the menu.

Angelo explains that their kitchen is classic with new twists of interpretation, and cream

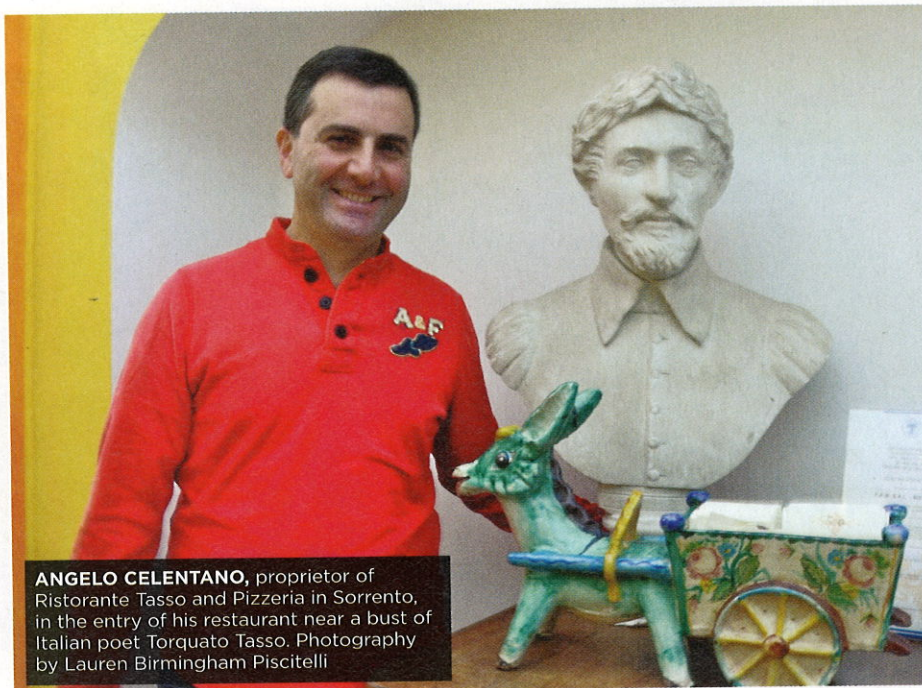
and butter are never used, only extra virgin olive oil.

"Our simple way of cooking with seasonal local produce, like the linguine and zucchini that you had for lunch, are examples of clean cuisine. Foods that are cooked with too many spices cover the flavor of the ingredients. In a plate of spaghetti, zucchini and Parmigiano, you need to taste the zucchini and Parmigiano; otherwise, it does not work," he says.

His philosophy in cooking not only advocates simplicity, but 'trasmettere emozioni.' "There's got to be emotion. Carrying a fresh fish right from the sea, bringing it to a client at the table, and then going in the kitchen to cook it, creates an atmosphere," he says.

And if it's true that you can judge a

**Chef Raffaele Porzio, executive pastry chef, mixes, whips, folds, bakes and glazes artful desserts in mignon style. Working in a pasticceria, he assembles the dessert portions, accompanied with assorted seasonal fruits, nuts, chocolate, gelato and sometimes limoncello, a lemon liqueur.**



**ANGELO CELENTANO**, proprietor of Ristorante Tasso and Pizzeria in Sorrento, in the entry of his restaurant near a bust of Italian poet Torquato Tasso. Photography by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

restaurant by its bread, then Ristorante Tasso hails 5 stars. Angelo says they make their bread daily from pizza dough. Their brick oven, which is deep, cavernous and wood-burning, churns out pizza Margherita, Marinara, Quattro Stagione in less than a minute. They also make Casatiello, a Neapolitan bread laced with small pieces of prosciutto, salumi e formaggio. Traditionally, this savory bread was made at home and incorporated into leftovers so nothing was wasted. It is baked golden on the outside and when sliced is rich and moist.

Angelo smiles wide as he says, "Italians love to eat! They always start with an antipasto, go onto pasta, and then secondo (the main course), which is very important for Italians." And they never skip dessert. Today, eating habits are changing and younger Italians are starting with an antipasto and going right to the secondo. "Tourists, however, order the pasta as their principal plate and then dessert," he adds.

At Tasso, fish is fresh and is brought each

day by the local fishermen. They set sail every night in wooden boats and return by early morning with daily catches of alici, merluzzo, spigola, pezzogna, gamberetti, and tonno, when in season. "They bring it to my door by 9 a.m.," Angelo says.

Executive Chef Franco Apreda heads the kitchen, spinning interpretations on favorites new and old: Caprese Salad with Fiascone Tomato, Basil and Olives; Pancetta-Wrapped Shrimp; Creamy Provolone Sauce and Sauteed Leeks; and Salt Cod with Beans and Sundried Tomato Puree.

Local wine complements local cuisine with regional Aglianico, Falanghina, Taurasi DOCG, Fiano, Greco, Biancolella and Per'e Palummo, and the restaurant's extensive wine cellar houses wines from all over Italy and the world.

Chef Raffaele Porzio, executive pastry chef, mixes, whips, folds, bakes and glazes artful desserts in mignon style. From a pasticceria, the second kitchen dedicated only for pastry making, he assembles mono portions accompanied with seasonal fruits, nuts, chocolate, gelato, reductions and sometimes limoncello.

My espresso arrives alongside a plate of golden biscotti. Luciano Pavarotti's rendition of "Torna a Surriento," a classic Neapolitan song, plays in the background. Its romantic lyrics have been calling visitors to return to Sorrento since its conception in 1902.

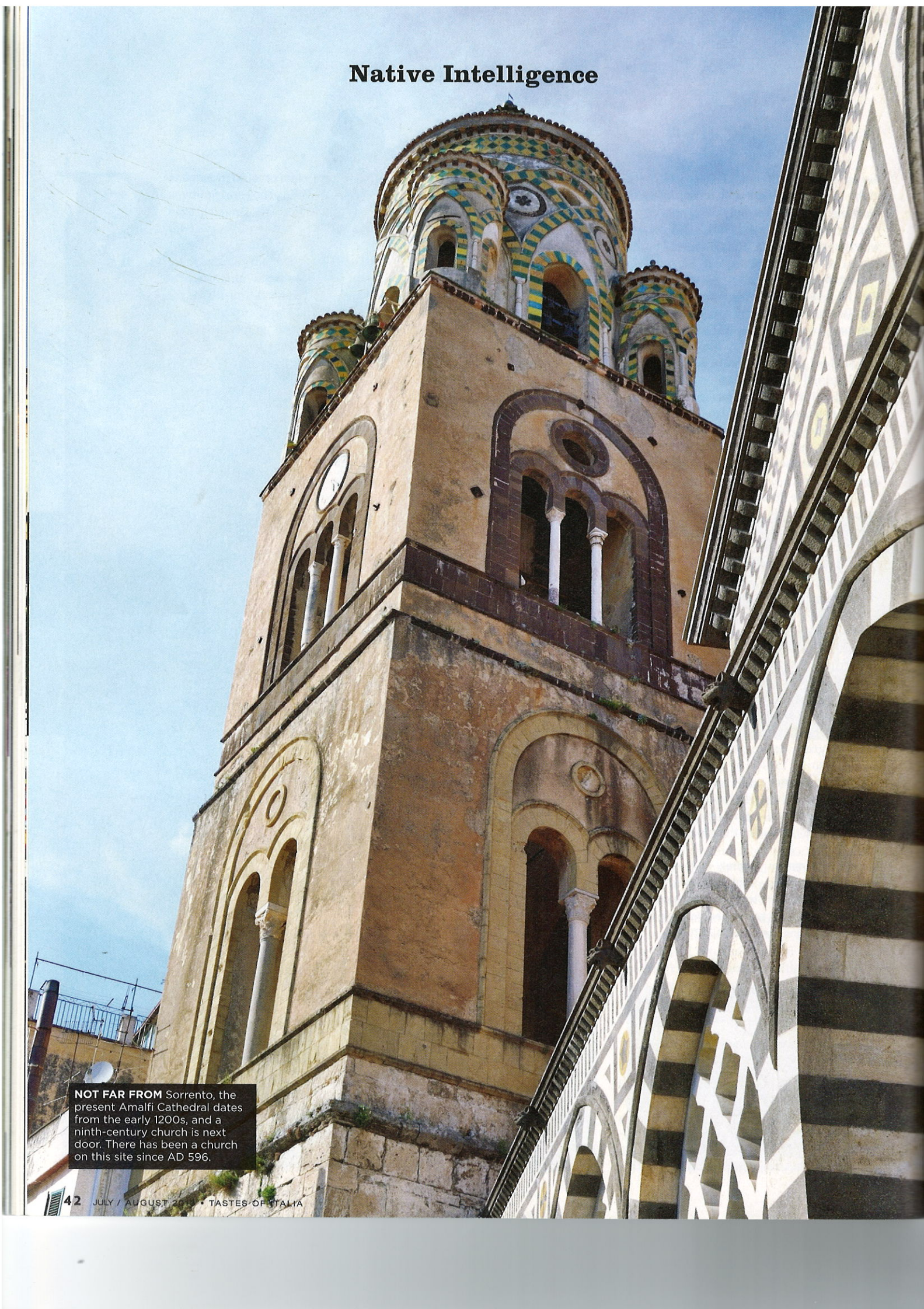
Ristorante Tasso is named after Torquato Tasso, a great Italian poet who was born in Sorrento in 1544. He went on to write "La Gerusalemme Liberata" (Jerusalem Delivered) in 1580. His poetic name will never be forgotten, especially at Ristorante Tasso, just off the square that takes his name.

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**OLD AND NEW** mingle in Sorrento, the birthplace of noted Renaissance poet Torquato Tasso, whose statue stands in the main square. At left, the popular Fauno Bar, built in 1950, is also located in the square. Photography by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

## Native Intelligence



**NOT FAR FROM** Sorrento, the present Amalfi Cathedral dates from the early 1200s, and a ninth-century church is next door. There has been a church on this site since AD 596.



**CHIESA DEL CARMINE**, or Church of Carmine, was built in the late 16th century on the remains of an ancient church in Sorrento, which honored early martyrs.