

A top-down view of a wooden table. In the upper center, a glass of red wine sits on a stem. Below it, a white plate holds a portion of pasta with a tomato-based sauce and fresh herbs. In the lower half of the frame, a whole pizza with a thick crust is topped with mushrooms, onions, and herbs. The text 'ENOTECA LA STORIA' is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

ENOTECA LA STORIA

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Mike's wedding photograph
Giuseppe & Catherine on their wedding day
January 2, 1977 at the site of St. Gabriel Catholic Church on Henry Street
in the "Tom Sawyer" section of Newark, New Jersey



Co-Owners Mike Guerra (L) and Joe Cannistraci (R)



Benvenuti! Welcome to Enoteca La Storia, an Italian wine bar run by Mike Guerra and Joe Cannistraci. The combination of the word “enoteca” (or “wine library” in English) with “la storia” (“story”) is as thoughtfully paired as the pasta is with the pinot noir. Fittingly, the focal point of the main room is the wine cabinet shelves. Bottles like oddly shaped books stock this “library,” waiting their turn to be selected and savored; they serve as a reminder that this place is a resource overflowing with knowledge. Providing thoughtfully crafted menus and a wide selection of offerings, Guerra and Cannistraci cultivate their customers’ palates, effortlessly easing guests past the chardonnay toward a sangiovese with muscular tannins.

Both co-owners agree that you can appreciate that bottle of zinfandel on a deeper level if you know where it comes from and the process vintners undergo to produce it. But although both co-owners share this affinity for the vine (as well as Italian backgrounds), their personalities are about as different as white grapes from red. Cannistraci used to be a plasterer, Guerra a social worker. Guerra describes Cannistraci as “an idea guy” and “good with his hands,” crediting him with hunting down the materials for their interior decorations. “As we speak, he’s putting a door in,” Guerra says, explaining that his partner is currently across town, executing the finishing touches at their recently opened second location (part of a project to recapture San Jose’s Little Italy). Guerra makes sure his partner gets the recognition he’s due, praising his drive most of all.

To illustrate, he refers to when Cannistraci first resolved to grow tomatoes. After tapping into a number of resources—books, internet, other growers—he became the local expert. “It went from him having a few plants in his yard to ‘Mike, I think I’m going to plant a few extra plants, and I’ll get a crop, and we’ll make something out of it at the enoteca’ to ‘Mike, I’m going to put in irrigation in the backyard, and I’m getting this special organic fertilizer, and I’m doing worm castings, and I’m buying a water filter.’ ” He’s now on the board of the World Tomato Society, and every May and June, regulars start asking after the latest crop.

“We’ve got very different personalities, but underneath it, we have the same values: your word is your bond. You treat people with respect.” – Mike Guerra



In contrast, Guerra identifies himself as more even-keeled. “I’m a little bit more thoughtful, a little quieter,” he says. “I like to think about things first and then do.” When a fired-up Cannistraci surges into the enoteca and ambushes his employees with a bunch of exciting new ideas, it’s Guerra who calms down the shell-shocked staff and steers them through a smooth transition process. It’s also Guerra and his expertise as a professional sommelier that members of the enoteca’s wine clubs have to thank for high-quality selections and for rotating regions and varietals. “We’ve got very different personalities, but underneath it, we have the same values: your word is your bond. You treat people with respect,” Guerra asserts. “We really want to do things well.”

To stay true to the enoteca spirit, everything Guerra and Cannistraci serve is either local or Italian. Guerra admits they’ve been tempted at times to add menu items that don’t fit either of those categories. “What’s kept us on the narrow path always comes down to ‘Is this who we are and what we’re about?’ ” he explains. “That helps us avoid pitfalls. We’ve got a good friend that says she always knows that a business is in trouble if it’s a retailer, but they bring in a slurpee machine.”

And this fealty to their values influences just about everyone they come into contact with. Not only do customers come away with a deeper understanding of wine, but the employees also experience benefits. “This gentleman here,” Guerra nods at a young man as he strides past, “he started out as a busser.” Enoteca La Storia slowly dissolved his initial shyness and replaced it with a newfound confidence and a promotion to server. “And now he’s a manager,” Guerra smiles. “We watched him grow as a person and as a professional. And we’ve had a bunch of people like that.”

Is your interest piqued? Come enjoy the bruschetta and a glass of syrah, and let Enoteca La Storia work its magic. [C](#)