



VASCO AND PIERO'S PAVILION

Fifty years of
Italian food in the
heart of Soho

Dashiell Wood and Paul Matteucci
with thanks to Richard Duguid



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*This book is a brief history of Vasco & Piero's
Pavilion restaurant. It has been written now for a
variety of reasons.*

*2020 marks our fiftieth year in operation. It also
sees Vasco's eightieth birthday. It has anyway been
felt for a long time that there should be a record of
the restaurant and its rich history.*

*The UK, London and Soho have been through
extraordinary changes over the decades in terms of
politics, technology, food, fashion and lifestyle. I
hope the book gives an impression of how the
restaurant has, where possible and always within
the traditions that we try to maintain, responded to
those developments and the changing tastes of our
customers.*

*Along the way we discover the Umbrian heritage
of Vasco and how he had a vision to create a
restaurant based on his childhood food memories
and experiences in various restaurants. Ultimately, it
is a personal book about Vasco's journey through
life.*

Paul Matteucci, 2020



San Giustino (photograph Alessandro
Puleri - public domain)

1970-1979

Born in San Giustino, a sleepy town in the north-eastern corner of Umbria, Vasco Matteucci set out across Europe in search of new horizons and exciting opportunities. He first travelled around Italy, staying in Viareggio and then Rome, where he completed his training in catering and hospitality. Armed with his new qualifications, he ventured out into wider Europe.

A natural explorer, Vasco first dropped anchor in Germany, where he spent six months working in a factory. During this time he was sleeping in a barn with no heating, and in mid winter it was so cold that on many mornings, he literally had to break the ice from his jeans. He then moved on to Switzerland and finally England.

Over in England, Vasco initially headed for Stratford-upon-Avon. As the birthplace of William Shakespeare, it seemed a fitting location in which to practise his English. After spending just over a year there, and with his English perfected (or so he would say), he could no longer resist the lure of the bright lights of London.

Arriving at the start of the sixties, Vasco was overwhelmed by London's rapid metamorphosis. As the city threw off the dreary post-war gloom it evolved a brighter and more dynamic outlook. This renaissance encouraged a mass influx of artists, musicians, writers and countless other creative people, which helped lay the groundwork for London's transformation into one of the leading cultural capitals of Europe.

In 1971, whilst working in a stable and comfortable job as a restaurant manager in the St George's Hotel in Langham Place, having risen from his initial position as a humble waiter, Vasco found himself chatting to one of these creative influencers. This was George Hoellering, an acclaimed Austrian film director.



The Pavilion as it appeared in the May 1988 issue of *The World of Interiors*



'The Pavilion Restaurant at the Academy Cinema' 1947, Angus McBean, (© Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

Hoellering was the manager and director of the revered Academy Cinema at 165 Oxford Street, which then housed on its top floor a neglected Hungarian tearoom known as The Pavilion. Seeking to revive The Pavilion's fortunes, Hoellering took something of a gamble and offered Vasco management of the restaurant, which Vasco decided to undertake with his Piedmontese friend Piero Oraziotti. Not surprisingly, the pair chose to transform the Hungarian tearoom into an Italian restaurant, aiming to offer the best Umbrian cuisine reflecting the trademark simplicity, tradition and heritage that makes Umbrian food special. While the menu was all new, it was deemed appropriate to retain an element of the old name, and thus Vasco & Piero's Pavilion Restaurant was born.

At the time, Umbrian food was still regarded with a certain degree of disdain, and the restaurant also struggled to find native Italian chefs, but the Pavilion's eye-catching décor, warm welcoming atmosphere and, of course, its excellent standard of food led to a series of very positive reviews in the press. These included an enthusiastic article in *Time Out* and the featuring of the restaurant in both the *Times* and *Which?*'s 1974 'Good Food' guides.

While the food had to change, and the name, too, to a lesser extent, The Pavilion's unusual and highly intricate interior was not, everyone agreed, to be done away with. It had been designed in 1951 by the celebrated Welsh surrealist photographer Angus McBean, with starred glass panels, bright pineapple-topped screens and deep plastered domes that housed complex chandeliers hand-wrought by McBean himself. The Pavilion can be seen in some of McBean's photography: the photograph on the previous page, for example, simply entitled 'The Pavilion Restaurant at the Academy Cinema', highlights especially the restaurant's beautiful interior and also McBean's surrealist style, with his partner David Ball dressed as both the female customer and male waiter comically



Angus McBean sitting in The Pavilion
(photograph: Mike Owen)

appearing simultaneously around various tables throughout the dining room. The image was even, for a brief time, projected on to some of the cinema's screens to promote the restaurant.

During the late seventies the nights were long and the restaurant hosted endless parties. One night the head chef decided to come out into the dining room and sing in his chef whites. Everyone loved it, clapping and singing along until 4 am. This became a regular event, often occurring night after night. It was tiring, but very lucrative: people would give Vasco their wallets and tell him to take whatever he wanted.

This was the era when the Stranglers turn up and find themselves sitting next to the Kinks. Siouxsie and the Banshees would party till late. The Pythons could be seen in their twenties writing their scripts and Andrew Lloyd Webber would be celebrating yet another West End success. Michael Heseltine was the head of Haymarket and the Saatchi Brothers were the advertising kings. Shaw Taylor would dine on Saturday nights then record his *Police 5* show on Sundays.



Vasco, Chef Marcello and Piero in The Pavilion above the Academy Cinema



Fresh tortelloni is made at least twice a day

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437-8774

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Closed Sat. and Sun. lunch
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Italian

The wine list is so lavishly illustrated it takes strong arms to handle it, but will reward the muscle-man with some unusual wines, including a choice of Barolos moderately priced. A word of warning: The delicious "crostini con funghi" should not be eaten before the show: the amount of garlic is more suitable for an *al fresco* performance! The Pavilion has a standing army of regulars, many from the rag trade territory opposite, and reservations are essential. About £12, with house wine.

of fine wine, and well set at table with a handsome cup that may yet greatly exceed the theoretical placement cost. Places of this kind, if they also take more of the tawdry trouble with cheap cut-cruffing wines, are obvious candidates for the *Food Guide's* wine glass dol, and five newcomers to status are discussed below.

Obviously they would not be fitted to this category if their cooking and service were pretty good too. As always, West Country is well repressed. But the Drangway in Asia is still more remote, in a much less favourable position: one can sense the rise as well as gratification in a recent note from a theatrical

The Cotswolds—a sea such an over-lit village as Moreton-on-the-Water—seem more obvious territory for presumptuous claret-fundlers, and John Gwynne's list at the Race Tree offers about 200 to choose from, most of them clearly in very small quantities, and therefore perhaps unwise to savor. But Mr. Gwynne is a persuasive salesman on his list, and his spelling mistakes are deliberate, and if you do not care to drink Ch. Brancu 47 at £24, his Ch. Brancu 47, or his California Zinfandel, and Australian Gouais, you may appeal. Jane Mann cooks, in what she describes as a "simple but interesting" manner, and is proudest of her terrine de truite Curiously,

Montacute, nestles under Dean Hill, on the very other side building in the district, Charles Darwin's Oak House was built—five centuries ago—the apartment. Ham stone. With a well in the centre of the dining-room, and decently spaced tables round it makes a civilized place to eat in, and the wine list is notable for the flexibility of choice it permits. There are beguiling hot bottles of claret and burgundy, desert wines by the glass, a base level of £3 for table wines, and fair prices for the likes of £7-£8 for Port or Ungarnian red, £5 and £6 for Ch. Sancerre, £7-£8 for Ch. Anjou, £5 for Grande Eclaircie 63 (Avery). Service and temperatures seem well judged too. The cooking follows scrupulously—a prawn and cucumber pancake made seasoning and was little more than the sum of its parts—but a professional heretic from afar expresses great pleasure in a whole pheasant stuffed and baked in pastry, and notes from a recent visit include roast pig, tomato crudités in two of the last three courses, and delicious braised onion among the vegetables. Curry or ginger flavoured in some dishes may vex the wine drinker as problem, but there is sufficient choice on the carte to avoid them.

London wine restaurants are usually well known: the Connaught, the Tate Gallery and (at a price) Le Gavroche earn their wine awards from the *Guide*, and whatever its other shortcomings Chris Vavilides' La Bette has no room left for a magazine. But for most London restaurants (as opposed to hotels)

The Drangway, 65 Wind Street, Swansea, W. Glamorgan Tel Swansea (0792) 461397 and 460806. Closed Sunday; Monday. Must book. Meals 12.15-2.15 (13.30 Saturday), 7.45-10.15. Table d'hôte lunch £3.95; table d'hôte dinner £5.95. A la carte meal with wine about £14.85.

Mirabelle, Station Road, West Runton, Norfolk. Tel West Runton (0203) 753 396. Closed Monday. Must book. Lunch 12.30-2. 7-9. Table d'hôte lunch £4; table d'hôte dinner £6.50. A la carte meal with wine about £11.60.

Rose Tree, Riverside, Bourton-on-the-Water, Glos. Tel Bourton-on-the-Water (0451) 20635. Closed lunch (except weekends); Monday; Sunday dinner. Must book. Meals 12.30-2 (weekends), 7.30-9.30. Table d'hôte lunch £5.50; two-course table d'hôte dinner £7.50; three-course table d'hôte dinner £8.50. Bed and breakfast £7.50.

Fowlsh House, off Wells Road, Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Tel Shepton Mallet (0749) 2022. Closed lunch; Sunday. Must book. Table d'hôte dinner (for two) including wine £15 and £20. Bed and breakfast £11.

Milk House, 17 The Borough, Marlack, Dorset. Tel Marlack (0932) 3823. Closed lunch; Sunday. Must book. Dinner 7-9.30. A la carte meal with wine about £9.50.

Vasco and Piero's Pavilion, Poland Street/Oxford Street, London, W1. Tel 01-437 8774. Closed Sunday; Saturday lunch; public holidays. Must book. Meals 12.3-6.11. A la carte meal with wine about £13.20.

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Where the best can be a bargain

The publishers of Which?

Please report to us on atmosphere, decor, and – if you stayed – standard of accommodation, as well as on food and drink.

1980-1989

As the 1980s arrived, Soho was at a turning point. The seedy strip-clubs and bookshops that had so characterised the area for the previous decades were steadily retreating. In their place, a wave of New Romantics flooded the district. The Academy Cinema, which served as the original Marquee Club and had already gained some fame in 1962 when it became the location of the first ever live performance by the Rolling Stones, was frequented by the area's new inhabitants. This was fantastic news for the Pavilion restaurant, which was now busy serving a new generation of customers.

The huge rise in the popularity of the live music and urban nightlife scenes brought new clients from the booming music, media and advertising industries. The Pavilion became a favourite lunchtime retreat for executives from local head offices, including the likes of music giant Sony, the hugely successful film production company Hat Trick Productions and the newly formed Channel 4.

Director Hoellering decreed that the avant-garde décor of the Pavilion must not be changed. As such, the interior was maintained in the same style for almost thirty-five years, with only the wallpapers and carpets being replaced when necessary; the replacements were as close to the original style as possible. This rule remained steadfast even in the years after Hoellering's death in 1980. At that point the Academy cinema entered a period of decline, with its ballroom, entrance lobby and cinema screens falling into a state of dire disrepair.

The Academy Cinema finally closed on 2 April 1986. In spite of this, Vasco and Piero's Pavilion Restaurant remained defiantly open.²² But it was now only accessible through a passageway running off Poland Street, decorated with surreal blue mosaics. It remained open in this fashion for three years until 1989, when



The Academy Cinema in 1984 (photograph: Martin Pinker)

it underwent a long overdue relocation to the current site at 15 Poland Street. This move was a mere couple of months before the Academy Cinema was demolished for good and the land sold off to accommodate expansion by the building's long-time neighbour, Marks & Spencer.

In an interview at the time of the move, Vasco revealed that an attempt was being made to maintain as much of McBean's iconic look as possible, despite having to overcome issues presented by a very tight budget. A large number of furnishings were transported from the old cinema to the new site. This included many of the wall decorations, the decorative pineapples and a large geometrically patterned wrought-iron screen, which can still be seen in the restaurant today. The complicated process of trying to preserve and replicate such a distinctive style was aided by advice from McBean, provided over the phone from his antique shop in Surrey.

Any of the various pieces of McBean's original furniture which had to be replaced, such as the restaurant's chairs and tables, were swapped for high-quality hand-made Umbrian equivalents. This promoted an authentic Italian feel, further emphasised by the new wine list, which was the first all-Italian selection in a London restaurant.

Despite the huge amount of effort made to keep things the same, some key architectural elements unfortunately had to be lost due to size constraints in the new site. This included the domed ceilings, shown on page 15, with McBean remarking that 'it would be frightfully costly to re-do it, and the end result wouldn't be satisfactory in any case'.

Despite the change of scenery, at its new site the restaurant maintained its high level of success, with critics praising the efforts to preserve the style of the original site while simultaneously injecting new life into the décor. Of course, the critics also remarked on the continued excellence of the food.

The new interior was large and spacious, now painted a striking pink rather than the original yellow, accompanied by a variety of ornamental stripes and ribbons. One critic playfully remarked that



Vasco and Piero's Pavilion in Poland Street

the elaborate interior was 'like the sort of tent the Empress Eugenie would have retired to during an outdoor pageant at Versailles'.

Even before the restaurant moved to Poland Street, the building had a very rich history of its own. Percy Shelley, the famous poet and figurehead of the 1800s Romantic literary movement, lived in rooms at 15 Poland Street with his friend Thomas Hogg. This was after their joint expulsion from Oxford in March 1811 for publishing a controversial pamphlet on the 'necessity of atheism'. Despite exclaiming, 'we must stay here; stay for ever!' upon seeing the room's 'delightful' grapevine-patterned wallpaper, Shelley returned to his original home in Sussex after less than a month. He did, however, return to London almost three years later, where he met Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, better known as Mary Shelley having taken his name after their marriage in 1816.

In 1818 Shelley moved to Italy, where he wrote some of his best work. This included the famous *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and *Adonais* (1821). Tragically, his life was cut short in 1822 when he died in a sailing accident at only 29 years of age.

Current eagle-eyed patrons may spot the commemorative blue plaque above the entrance to the restaurant. It was erected at the turn of the millennium as part of an ongoing English Heritage programme and reads 'PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY 1792–1822. Poet lived here in 1811'.

Vasco and Piero's Pavilion now regularly hosts meals for the Percy Shelley Foundation, who have quadrennial meetings discussing and celebrating the poet's life and work. The foundation's members even frequently request, in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, to have the name of the restaurant changed to 'Vasco and Shelley's Pavilion'.



Percy Bysshe Shelley's Blue plaque placed above the restaurant

restaurants

ARTICLES 1980-1989

FREUDIAN SLIP

The Pavilion is more than one politician's favourite restaurant BY KEN LIVINGSTONE

IT IS TEN YEARS since I first saw Clement Freud in the flesh when we were both having lunch with women friends in the Archduke Wine Bar on the South Bank. That evening I took another friend to my favourite restaurant, THE PAVILION. To my amazement Clement Freud was there, also in the company of a different woman to the one he had lunched with.

Given the chances that this was pure coincidence were several million to one, my leftie friend and I spent much of the evening discussing, in hushed tones, the likelihood that he was working on a report for MI5 about which restaurants were frequented by dangerous lefties. Fortunately my growing paranoia was nipped in the bud when, as he got up to leave, he came over and simply asked: "Where are you having breakfast?"

I had stumbled on Clement's favourite restaurant, and stumbled in the right word. The Pavilion used to be hidden away inside the Academy Cinema on Oxford Street, a sadly unsuccessful cinema which specialized in European films. After going to the loo during a particularly uninspiring film I took a wrong turning and wandered into the Pavilion instead of back into the auditorium.

The Pavilion was one of the first new restaurants to open after World War II and was considered among the most imaginative examples of original thinking in architecture in that brave new postwar world. Built as an integral part of the cinema, with a blue-gold art deco design, it was unlike anything else in London. The

themselves on Poland Street not inevitable, but the upheaval had the effect of improving an already excellent menu.

My sautéed oyster mush with garlic and parsley on a rocket was rich without being and the grilled salmon was cool perfection. The pesto vinaigrette added a stimulating sharpness.

For a change I switched from usual bottle of Gavi to try the Conventi, a truly magnificent "honeysuckle" Chardonnay.

Right: Plaster Ionic - or Ionic - column, one of six holding up the domes. Wrought-iron ribs sheath the column to create the effect of fluting. Below: Lion-bossed wall lamps mounted on the blue columns are in spoof Empire style or "Forced Empire" as McBean calls it.



EMPIRE DINER

REPORT BY JONATHAN GLANCEY WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID GEORGE

Post-modern surely? A touch of Soane, a dash of Graves, brushes of whimsy more convincing than Jencks - interior of the 80s, design of

Hollering and was originally a coffee bar for cinema goers, which is why until last month you could always get to the restaurant through the cinema (and although you weren't exactly

of the decorations myself." Wonderful decorations too. The plaster domes are visibly supported by six blue painted Ionic columns. They would be labelled Ionic today, because although they appear to be fluted, they



AROUND THE CITY WITH TERRY FARRELL
DINING OUT WITH ANGUS McBEAN
AT HOME WITH THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

Right: The tent-like, dome-like spaces of McBean's Pavilion seen through the pineapple-topped screen of the cocktail bar. Designed in 1951, the restaurant is partly an exercise in Festival of Britain manners - chairs, tables and lamps were all designed and mostly made by McBean.



confection of vanilla ice-cream with a crumbly coating, topped with honey coconut, cream and then deep fried. For those who, like myself, are not really pudding people but get bored watching other people eat, deep-fried brie with a gooseberry puree is offered as a savoury.

The décor of marble floors and high wood-pannelling is pleasingly austere and in keeping with the posher elements of the menu but is at odds with the plastic table-

cloths and paper serviettes; and the undeniably attentive staff seem a mite uncomfortable in their subdued and formal roles. There's no escaping the impression that beneath the dignified façade lurks a jolly hamburger joint.

Sara O'Reilly
Mallards Wine Bar and Restaurant *Riverside House, Water Lane, Richmond, Surrey (948 7733) Richmond tube/BR. Open daily.*

FRENCH

ROYAL CAMP

My visit to Vasco and Piero's **Pavilion** in Poland Street was prompted by a chance meeting with Pascal, their *sous chef* in a pub in Spitalfields. 'If this man can cook food like he can talk food,' I thought, 'then this has got to be worth trying.' The Pavilion is a reincarnation of the restaurant upstairs the lamented Academy in Oxford Street, and they have taken their former style with them. The star of this place is the décor. The place is tricked out like the sort of tent the Empress Eugenie would have retired to during an outdoor pageant at Versailles. The whole room is painted in *trompe l'oeil* pink with swags, ribbons, stripes and blue sky peeking through holes in the roof. It just stays on the right side of the line dividing elegant novelty from OTT kitsch.

The food is pretty good as well. The menu is small, about half a dozen dishes in each section, and almost illegibly handwritten. We started with mussel and shrimp salad - beautifully presented but the shrimps were a bit woolly - and three spinach and cheese pancakes standing upright in a cheese and tomato sauce; very tasty. For our main course I had liver Veneziana, essentially liver and onions, but the best liver and onions that I've ever had. My partner had a large pink breast of duck, sliced and covered with a green peppercorn sauce. Desserts come from a list chanted by the waiter, from which we chose a very good fruit salad topped with zabaglione and a fairly mundane strawberry flan. With a bottle of wine from a list that is strong on Italian wines but slightly expensive, coffee and a couple of brandies we paid just over £50 for two, excluding service.

Andrew Diamond

Pavilion 15 Poland St, W1 (437 8774) Oxford Circus tube. Open Mon-Fri 12-3, Mon-Sat 6-11.



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POLAND
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CITY OF WESTMINSTER



Vasco & Piero's Pavilion

Ristorante Italiano

15

The façade of the Pavilion restaurant

1990-1999

As London counted down the years to the new millennium, Soho underwent a period of gentrification. Landlords increased their rents, forcing many small restaurants out of the area. The empty properties that they left behind were rapidly swallowed up by homogenous restaurant chains, and the diversity for which the area was so loved and celebrated in previous years was hugely decreased.

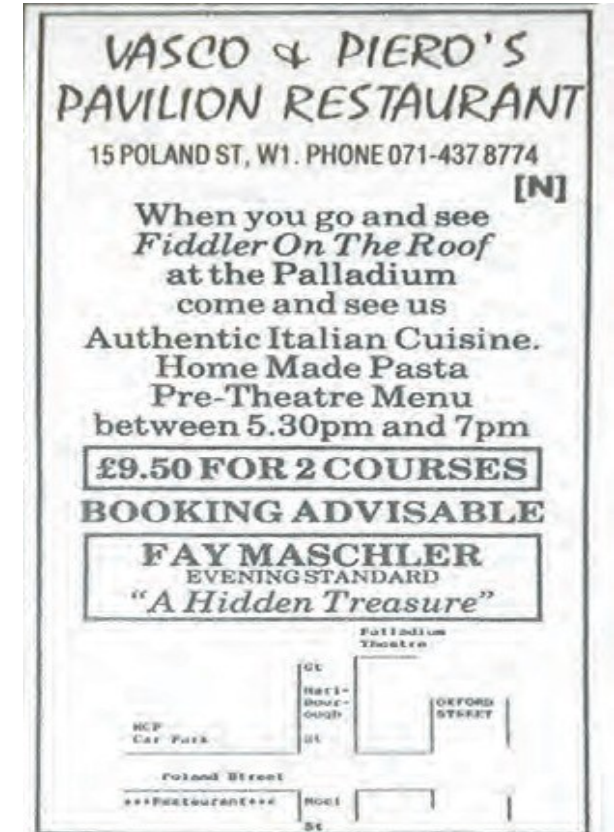
Around this time the Pavilion also became a favourite for the leading lights of New Labour, hosting countless meetings and gatherings, with guests often being pursued relentlessly by streams of paparazzi.

London theatre boomed in the 1990s, with a veritable explosion of new writers, actors and theatres appearing on the scene. The restaurant naturally became a favourite of theatregoers, who soaked up the cosy atmosphere while enjoying a hearty bite from the newly introduced pre-theatre menu. This grew the customer base of the restaurant and was sustained by a new investment in advertising campaigns which specifically targeted theatregoers via local newspapers.

As well as the growth of Soho's theatre and political scene, the now well-established advertising and media industries increased their footholds in the area. With the launch of Channel 5 in 1997 and the arrival of the CNN International head office, Soho was bustling with countless new faces.

In 1994, John Walsh of the *Independent* published a glowing review of Vasco and Piero's. Headlined 'Snug and rich, with a feast of treats', the article fondly described the 'Umbrian paradise in the heart of Soho'.

One of the core aims of Vasco and Piero's had always been to stand out from the crowd, and the commitment to this goal



Advertisement for Vasco and Piero's Pavilion Restaurant in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 1994

was finally paying dividends. Walsh's article highlighted the restaurant's departure from the usual 'stale breadsticks' and microwaved veal and ratatouille that had come to define the majority of the Italian food London had to offer.

Soho has become a district that promotes the ideals of freedom and artistic expression. These values are particularly evident in the graffiti murals throughout Poland Street. The mural pictured opposite dates from the early 1990s. It was painted by Louise Vines, and is part of a project by the London Wall Group that aimed to decorate the streets of Soho and capture important elements of local history. Titled *Ode to the West Wind*, the mural takes its inspiration from Percy Shelley's 1819 poem of the same name. A figure wearing the colours 'yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red', as described in the poem, is sitting below a broken tree, representing the Great Storm of 1987 and commemorating the eighteen lives it tragically took.

The durability of the special paint used in the piece has kept the wall vibrantly coloured and without the usual signs of ageing even twenty-seven years on. Much like the restaurant itself, the wall art outside adds a splash of colour to the local area. A welcome relief from the hectic London political scene, it was no wonder that the relaxed and cosy atmosphere of Vasco and Piero's, which one reviewer described as feeling like a home where you've 'been welcomed like a long lost relative' and a friendly place in which 'no one eyes you up and down', became the favourite haunt of various political figures, including soon-to-be London mayor Ken Livingstone and Chancellor Gordon Brown.

The cartoon on page 36 by Kipper Williams pictures an evening in which a group of newspaper cartoonists were dining at Vasco and Piero's and, rather comically, found themselves to be sitting right



Louise Vines' mural



"We were having a cartoonists' dinner at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion in Soho a few years ago when we spotted Gordon Brown. I've been back a number of times since, but no sign of Gordon — maybe he realised he was being looked at."

Kipper Williams

opposite Gordon Brown. The new-found political importance of the restaurant didn't just pique the interest of cartoonists, however, and the kitchen became the favoured hiding place of many a politician trying to evade the hordes of paparazzi that frequently gathered outside.

Having gained a solid financial footing, Vasco and Piero's Pavilion Restaurant began to seek ways to give back to the local community that had helped nurture their success over the years. Throughout the 1990s the restaurant supported many charitable initiatives, for example providing numerous free meals to be won as prizes at various charity auctions and events.

Most significantly, in 1998 Vasco and Piero's supported the newly founded Streetsmart initiative in 1998 by adding a £1 optional donation to customer's bills, which went directly towards helping the homeless. The donations were extremely popular, with the vast majority of costumers choosing to donate and many giving significantly more than the suggested contribution.

Thanks to support from establishments like Vasco and Piero's, the first Streetsmart campaign was a huge success, and the initiative continues to run yearly in countless London restaurants to this day.

Unfortunately, by 1999, the restaurant's décor was ageing, not having been updated for almost a decade. Mirroring the arrival of the new millennium, the restaurant redecorated. The flamboyant pink walls were swapped for a sleeker, more modern white design, and a greatly improved lighting system was installed.

To celebrate the redecoration, and to help pay for the costs, the restaurant began to open on weekends for the first time, offering limited time service on various Saturdays leading up to the new year.



Toni, Maurizio and Vasco

ARTICLES 1990-1999



PICTURE: BY CHRIS BALL

THE MEAL THING: Chancellor Gordon Brown on his dinner date in London with fiancée Sarah Macaulay

It's Charm-cellar Brown

WITH the Budget just days away you'd have thought Gordon Brown would be sick of looking at figures.

But he found time to pore over his pretty fiancée's on an intimate dinner date, as our exclusive photo

EXCLUSIVE

By JAMES WEATHERUP

met three years ago at a fundraising event she organised for Labour.

love as they tucked into £14.50-a-head meals at one of Mr Brown's favourite eateries, Vasco And Piero's Pavilion in London's West End. After dinner and a bottle of white wine, they jumped into a



1995

Evening Standard LONDON RESTAURANT GUIDE

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion

15 Poland Street, W1

071-437 8774

'An unpretentious corner of Italy'

Despite the abundance of Italian restaurants in London, few resemble the charm of Vasco & Piero's Pavilion. The restaurant, for a variety of reasons, has remained constant since its opening in 1961. The restaurant used to be located in the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street (remember 'Les Enfants du Paradis'), and in its transfer to present Poland Street re-created an impression of the singular A interior that evoked the striped and beribboned tents of Ownership has remained constant although a member of its partner when Piero died three years ago and Vasco's son team. Dishes have moved with the times, capitalizing on availability of ingredients such as balsamic vinegar, mozzarella and sun-dried tomatoes, but they are still pre old-fashioned sort of care and an agreeable lack of flourishes. Menus change regularly. The first course features zuppa di ceci is a particularly homely sort of minestrone—often with shavings of Parmesan as a garnish, frittata and part of an antipasto based on grilled vegetables and a home two. Try the spinach and ricotta tortelloni if it is on offer: courses are grilled cod with a herb crust, grilled sea bass rabbit in mustard sauce, roast leg of new season lamb, calf fresh sage. Vegetables tend to be wholesomely cooked in its smothered in butter. Desserts are authentically unadventurous pancake caracole fresh fruit and cream makes a change to the scope of Italian wines is are not greedily priced. Service

2.00-3.00pm and 5.00-11.00pm.
(P.F.E.D.) All major cards. NUMBER OF SEAT
average. SET PRICE LUNCH: £10.50. Set
tableside service (first and second)

SHORT BITES fay maschler

DOING BUSINESS

second helpings fay maschler revisits...

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion 15 Poland Street, W1 (0171-437 8774); £26 (evenings)

Only pineapple carvings, of the sort that might decorate an ornate tent pole, adorning a new screen by the door serve as a reminder of the original decorative pavilion theme devised by Angus McBean for this restaurant when it was part of the now, sadly, defunct Academy Cinema. I suppose a revamp was inevitable—paper and paints were peeling—but it is a pity that the decision on the colour of the walls is that old chestnut, rag-rolled apricot. Another cliché of restaurant interiors—uplighters—has also not been resisted. However, the same long-serving family of waiters, who in their publicity postcard look like a still from a fairly benign scene in *Donnie Brasco*, man the room, and the evening menu—£14.50 for two courses, £17.50 for three—continues to offer notably good value. Dishes are unpretentious, light and fresh. A first course of spaghetti with tomato and basil was joyously simple. The sauce had been quickly assembled leaving the flavours of the vegetable

(or is it a fruit?) and herb intact. A salad of asparagus with sliced new potatoes and a creamy dressing deftly spiked with gorgonzola retained a crunch in the stalks of 'grass'. A traditional Tuscan crostini made with chicken livers was another temptation as a starter. Grilling is the favoured cooking method for the main courses. Both the tender calves' liver, the well-seasoned breast of guinea fowl and its accompanying polenta prepared this way were sound and the vegetables that accompanied them crisp enough to have been cooked to order. Tortelloni, something of a signature dish of V & P's Pavilion, was offered with a filling of aubergine. For dessert we shared a semi-freddo served with blobs of caramel which was cold, soft and sweet and which seemed to meet any reasonable expectations of a dessert. Prices on the Italian wine list do not wreck the fair deal. No music is played which adds to the agreeable sense of solidity and gravitas. A nice fixture in old Soho.

ALASTAIR LITTLE gives us his top tip for booking at the most fashionable restaurants (don't bother)

When it comes to choosing the best restaurants, Alastair Little is resolutely anti-fashion. Waiting lists are no guarantee of hospitality or reliability, he argues

LONDON'S VAST AND EVER-INCREASING restaurant population presents a staggering array of choice. A few, very selective, suggestions and guidelines for the bewildered may be helpful.

Firstly, avoid the ultra-fishy London-like all

major cities—London, its affluent and fashionable neighbour will only find out about a restaurant in a 15

time it's out. Given that London is the only selling of many of these places, going there may well be a

of course. London is a restaurant, it is said to

fairly priced, the service friendly and efficient, and you have a good chance of seeing a greater variety of food. Jersey King and Chris Corbin do not follow fashion, but do they create it, but surely follow their almost infallible instincts and good taste. They are planning a third ven-

VASCO & PIERO'S PAVILION 15 Poland Street, W1 (071-437 8774), £25.

If, like me, you still regret the closure of the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, a visit to Vasco & Piero's Pavilion will have a certain poignancy. The Poland Street restaurant is the re-creation, under the same ownership, of the Angus McBean-designed original that was housed in the same building as the Academy. The Italian food, which has moved with the times, is sound and steady. Daily-changing set-price meals are eminently reasonable and the dishes more inventive than the average trattoria supplies, viz salad of baby spinach, chorizo and pecorino shavings; poached skate wings with fennel sauce. It doesn't really pay, in any sense, to stray onto the à la carte.

Prices are per person for dinner with half a bottle of wine. Excerpted from *Evening Standard London Restaurant Guide* by Fay Maschler (Pavilion Books, £9.99). © Evening Standard 1993. See Fay Maschler's restaurant reviews in today's *Evening Standard*.

availability of ingredients such as balsamic vinegar, rucola, buffalo mozzarella and sun-dried tomatoes but they are still prepared with an old-fashioned kind of care. Menus change regularly. The first course features soup—a particularly homely kind of minestrone—various salads, frittata either alone or as part of an antipasto, and a home-made pasta & two. Typical main courses are grille cod with a herb crust; grilled sea bass with fennel; rabbit in mustard sauce. Some of the scope of Italian wines is apparent from the list and bottles at not greedily priced. Service is affable yet dignified.

VASCO & PIERO'S PAVILION 15 Poland Street, W1 (0171-437 8774), £25.

Despite the abundance of Italian restaurants, few resemble those you would find in Italy. The Pavilion, for a variety of reasons, does. Ownership has remained constant since its original manifestation above the late, lamented Academy Cinema in Oxford Street. Dishes have moved with the times, capitalising on the new easy

Prices are per person for a meal with half a bottle of wine. Adapted from *Evening Standard London Restaurant Guide 1995* by Fay Maschler (Pavilion Books, £9.99).

'Avoid like the plague any restaurant or bar with security personnel—who wants to dine in a place that needs bouncers? Likewise, restaurants that try to squeeze in too many sittings and don't allow enough time to eat.'



The kitchen at Kensington Place, where the food and service have 'stood the test of time' Alastair Little

THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK

Vasco and Piero's Pavilion 15 Poland Street/W1; Tel: 0171 437 8774. Unfashionable, inexpensive, comfortable—just great Italian food.

Mandarin Kitchen 14-16 Queensway/W2; Tel: 0171 722 0012. The place to go for authentic Italian food.

Magic Wok 100 Queensway/W2; Tel: 0171 792 9167. Stick to the special list for the best authentic, robust cooking.

Kensington Place 201 Kensington Church Street/W8; Tel: 0171 727 3184. Glamorous, noisy, metropolitan; the food and service have stood the test of time.

Assaggi 101 Cheapside Place/W2; Tel: 0171 792 5261. Now, hip and hard to get into, inspirational Italian food and wine.

The Ivy 1 West Street/WC2; Tel: 0171 836 4251. and

FREE WITH THE EVENING STANDARD



second helpings alastair little revisits...

Vasco and Piero's Pavilion 15 Poland Street, W1 (0171-437 8774)

'Unfashionable, inexpensive, comfortable, with great Italian food,' were my comments in an article I wrote some time ago listing my personal favourite London restaurant, Vasco and Piero's Pavilion. A review shouldn't need to say any more in recommendation but if you add the fact that the place has been open for more than 30 years, has a loyal and devoted following (including the people's choice for London's mayor), a pleasant and civilised atmosphere and an interesting and cheap selection of Italian wines, then that place becomes almost perfect. Ask Vasco what he is especially pleased with that day, and on no account ignore his advice if it includes fresh pasta, calves' liver or sea bass. Swill it down with Frescobaldi's excellent Chianti Classico Riserva 'Nipozzana'. Other high points of recent meals were a superb and huge crostini with chicken livers, some excellent salami from Norcia (a town so famed in Italy for the quality of its hams and sausages that the word Norcino has become synonymous with pork butchers), and the quality of the vegetables, served in the English manner with the main course. Sopressata, if offered on the menu, is not to be missed; it is an unusually delicious Umbrian version of brawn, served generously but thinly sliced so it is meltingly tender. Generous is probably the right word to sum up this restaurant, but modesty and consistency figure in the equation as well. Do not go there to be surprised or challenged by the food—that is not what it is about. Instead, go to eat some of the best and entirely contemporary Italian food in the country. Beware: despite not being in the forefront of our capital's restaurant revolution, the Pavilion is seriously busy, so do book and please note that Vasco now opens on Sunday nights. Something he has resisted for years, but remains firmly closed on Sundays. Dinner costs £15.50 for two courses or £18.50 for three. Lunch is even busier, full of the remnants of Soho's film business, and is more expensive, with items individually priced. Best wine buy: Tignanello 1995, at £45.

Prices are per person for a meal with half a bottle of wine

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion Restaurant

URGENT NEWS

GUEST CHEF FROM CITTA' DI CASTELLO IN UMBRIA

PATRIZIO THE FLYING RISOTTO MAKER
HAS JUST LANDED IN WEST SOHO



Il riso: una storia
che comincia molto lontano,
molto tempo fa



ON DIFFERENT DAYS OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS HE WILL BE MAKING:

RISOTTO AL RADICCHIO
RISOTTINO AL LIMONE
RISOTTO PRIMAVERA
RISOTTO ALLA MILANESE
RISOTTO AL SAPORE DI MARE
RISOTTO VERDE ALL'UMBRIA



15 Poland Street, London W1V 3DE Telephone 0171-437 8774



Left: one of the many eccentric menus; Top: floor staff; Bottom: chefs

2000-2009

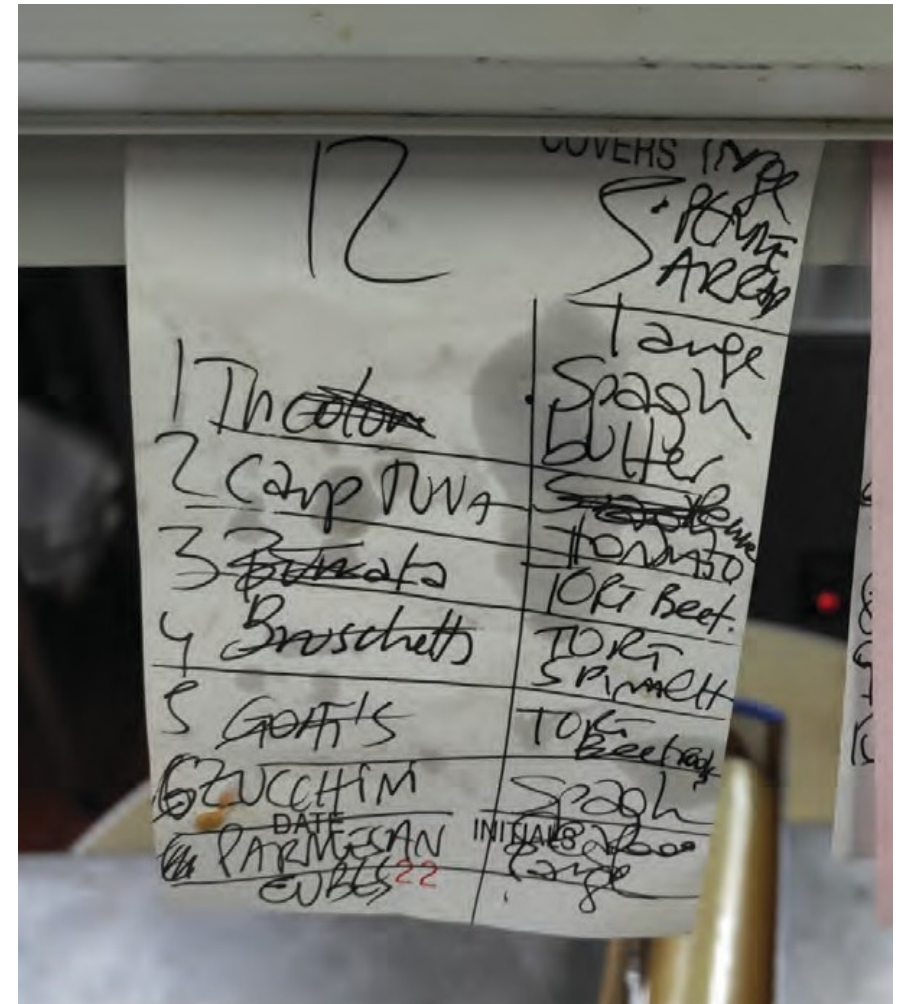
The 2000s were an exciting time for London. Despite the closure of many of the area's most popular and famous nightclubs, and increased fears of over-gentrification catalysed by the looming arrival of the government's Crossrail scheme, Soho was still booming. Rising globalism and an increased appetite for new cultures and experiences placed London's most diverse district at centre stage.

The strength of the British entertainment industry continued to draw new visitors from far and wide to Soho. Whether seeking a good meal for a lunchbreak from the many nearby offices of big-name media groups or an exciting evening out of West End shows and arthouse cinema, the continued critical success of Vasco and Piero's brought in numerous new faces.

Featuring in the influential millennium issue of *Square Meal* magazine, the most popular restaurant guide among London executives, the restaurant was praised for its 'exceptional value' and the sophistication of the new white interior design.

2000 was of course the year when all computers were to crash and everything chip-based would stop. Nothing dramatic happened and it was business as usual – that is, things changed rapidly. The 2000s saw the real explosion of the internet and lots of new start-up companies using the technology to disrupt the normal way of doing things. A regular customer of ours, Martha Lane Fox, had started lastminute.com two years before in 1998 with Brent Hoberman. We were keen to get involved, and we soon had our first internet-based booking system. However, in the early days we got lastminute.com to send the restaurant confirmations of any bookings by fax, as everyone was a little wary of the new technology.

At this time, Opentable, the fully managed online booking system, was being developed, in the USA. Eventually, lastminute.com



A late-night order in the kitchen

concentrated on holidays, and we moved to Opentable. These booking systems are a great development, and mean that restaurants can become ageless and not class-based. Anyone can

book any restaurant without being put off by a snooty maitre d'. Our restaurant became truly global, with our customers reflecting all ages and nationalities.

Jamie Oliver burst on to the scene at this time, dominating the television schedules, showing that it was possible to cook and still be a cool lad. Cooking became a hobby for men: all the hi-tech equipment had to be bought, and all the latest cookbooks, glossy with sharp photos, were laid on coffee tables next to art books.

During this decade, cookery programmes began to take over our TV screens. By the end of the period Heston Blumenthal was showing off cooking as a kind of magic trick, using processes that could never be replicated at home. *Masterchef* became a programme that promoted the fusion of ingredients and recipes from all over the world. This can work or can go badly wrong!

On the economic side, the financial crash of 2008 was a very scary time for everyone. Overnight, there were runs on banks. The banks had lent too much money, unsustainably, and were overwhelmed by debts. Vasco & Piero's Pavilion restaurant never expanded and never took on debt, so it was not under immediate pressure. However, the crisis meant that fewer people were going out, or they would go to less expensive places. Business expense accounts were cut, and many companies reduced their size or got rid of central London offices altogether.

But it wasn't long before new restaurant ideas were being talked about. The twin concept of sharing dishes and small plates began, often presented in a more casual setting with no table cloths. Initially, we didn't really follow these trends, as we were established and had a regular, older clientele. But as the decade closed, it became clear that we should respond.

SQUARE MEAL

2003

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion ★ 273

15 Poland St W1 ☎ 7437 8774

✕ £33 Wine £11.50 Champagne £42.00 Private Room 36

Mon-Fri 12N-3pm 6-11pm Sat 7-11pm

The Matteucci family's venture first opened in 1970 in the Academy Cinema around the corner. The Cinema is long-gone as, too, are countless restaurant competitors who, if only they'd adhered to the V&P formula of unarguable value, genuine friendliness & 'v good, simple food', might have been as 'very busy' as Vasco's remains today. From the daily changing menu, a £22.50 three-course dinner might kick off with a thrillingly fresh bowl of homemade tagliatelle with king prawns & rocket before moving on to simple fish grills with zingy dressings, & herb-infused meats: tuna with ginger dressing or sliced beef fillet with rosemary oil & lip-licking misto vegetables, say. Desserts are panna cotta & cheesecake traditional.

Square Meal review, 2003



Pasta chef Marco Donnini

ARTICLES 2000-2009

Our first meal

lawrence dallaglio and victor ubogu

feeding time **R**

One of the last remaining unadulterated establishments in Soho: chef Marco Donnini and Vasco at Vasco and Piero's Pavilion

No fuss, no pretension, just good Italian

understood style. Before the meal you can drink margaritas, calipirinhas or pisco sour. Beer drinkers can choose the dark Mexican Negra Modelo.

Coffee is made with Brazilian Bourbon beans supplied by the Fazenda Ottolenghi family or with a decaffeinated Colombian variety. Also available is South American green maté, a drink made from the dried leaves of the yerba plant, traditionally sipped from a gourd through a metal tube. Inexpensive maté drinkers tend to burn their lips.

Drinks: Chile and Argentina

IMAGINE the joy when, in opening my post, I discovered details of a new bar and restaurant, Amber, 6 Poland Street (020 7354 8094), claiming to offer "the finest flavours in food and drink from Latin America and the Iberian peninsula". Here, falling into my lap like a ripe plum, was a fully-dedicated theme, the format we restaurant reviewers struggle to arrive at. Of course, I hurried along, but in the hope of the hopelessly

little while, a more agreeable one. I should admit here that I quite often use this restaurant when off-duty because it has been doing what it does fundamentally unimpaired – without fuss or pretension under the same owners and with many of the same waiters for a long time. Indeed, Vasco and Piero's is one of the last remaining unadulterated establishments representing the culinary hegemony of Soho. Ken Livingstone likes to eat here. I saw him the last time I was in. So, I am sure that Gordon Brown. That is in

Rugby international Lawrence Dallaglio (left), 27, is the England number eight in the Six Nations Championship and is captain of London Wasps. He lives in Ladbroke Grove, west London, with his girlfriend and two daughters, aged three and ten months. Former England prop Victor Ubogu, 35, plays for Bath and is the founder of two Shoeless Joe's bar-restaurants in central London. He lives in Bath.

For a night out in London we'll meet at one of Vic's bars. It's a good starting point from which to move on. Vic's in the trade, so I'm happy for him to choose where we go. For good cuisine we'd go to Nobu or Isola in Knightsbridge, but I prefer to go to discreet places that are lesser known – there's an Italian restaurant on Poland Street, for instance, Vasco's Pavilion, which serves the highest quality food at great prices. Over dinner, we just catch up on all the gossip like a pair of girls. Then we may move on to Tokyo Joe's.



City Diary

Invisible Scott appears in Soho

THE Prime Minister's economic adviser has been reassuring the City that things are not that bad really. I hear that Derek Scott, who was once at BZW, addressed an audience of fund managers and other financial types at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion, a Soho restaurant much favoured by new Labour, the other night.

"He said he's a Brummie so he normally takes a cautious view of the world. He said medium-term prospects didn't look too bad," says one who was present. How long is medium term? "Three to five years. He wasn't giving a short-term forecast, for sure."

Scott is a near-invisible policy wonk and the closest thing Blair has to Gordon Brown's

Gavyn Davies. "We don't comment on meetings that may or may not happen with people in this building," said a No 10 source sternly.

Still, any reassurance is welcome these days, I suppose.

Let's Meet At - Vasco & Piero's Pavilion

FR Week UK, 16 November 2007, 12:00am

Be the first to comment

Reviewed by Marc Prema-Ratner, MD, Zest Corporate PR.

So, what key ingredient makes a good restaurant great? It has to be any proprietor of a cult who regularly travels the Umbrian woods in search of the best truffles in Italy in order to dull appetites. Enter Vasco & Piero's Pavilion.

This bistro eatery, with its cheery, ochre decor, immediately imbues a soul-warming ambience before you have tucked into the array of mouth-watering cuisine, whether it is tuna carpaccio with onions & ginger dressing, or spinach & ricotta tortellini with butter & sage, or indeed grilled beef with wild mushrooms: the tantalising list goes on. The menu is sufficiently varied, but not over subtle panacotta with fresh raspberry coulis is enough to send the Flake girls into the next dim

Is your mouth watering yet? Well, it should be. All washed down with an array of fine wines, with towards the 'Supertuscan' region.

As you can see, I am really fond of this establishment of extraordinary culinary rouse. Its unique passion for good food, impeccable service and attention to the vibe of pleasant dining is one of the best examples of gastronomy I have ever come across.

Where: 15 Poland Street, London, W1F 8GE
Contact: 020 7437 8774

How much: Around £38 per person

Top Italian restaurants

Enjoy the authentic taste of Italy with Square Meats guide to la dolce vita in the South East

LA LUNA

10-14 Wilton Street, Godalming, Surrey (01483 424250). Tue-Sat noon-2pm, 7-10pm

Both chefs that this is just another small town pizza and pasta place. The owner, Sicilian and passionate about his food and his restaurant, is a scoring key ingredients from the island. The short selection of dishes is carried off with a sure touch from a starter of fresh Sicilian goat's cheese and chive-grilled vegetable terrine, via an immediate course – lay on the lime ricotta with sautéed prawns – to a main of organic pork tenderloin stuffed with salami mousses. Make sure you take home the seasonally rich chocolate and almond cake.

LOCANDA LOCATELLI

Heart of the Matter, The Church, 8 Seymour Street, W1 (020 7437 8088). open Mon-Sat noon-3pm, 7-11pm (Fri-Sat 11-3pm)

Italian value continues to perform at an impressive level. The house special portions of elegantly executed

THE EAT Zafferano

15 Lonsdale Street, SW2 (020 7288 9800). open Mon-Fri noon-2:30pm; Sat-Sun 12:30-3pm; Mon-Sat 7-11pm (Fri-Sat 11-3pm)

Some say the best Italian food is in the heart of the neighbourhood. Zafferano changed for the worse following last year's extensive refurbishment, but scores of fans maintain that it still offers a superb dining experience. The food is based largely on rustic fare brought to new

home cooking and warm service. The popular antipasti buffet is practically a meal in itself, while the classics (osso bucco, chicken milanese) are as rustic as the wine list. Highly recommended.

OSTERIA BASILIO

29 Kensington Park Road, W2 (020 7277 9372). open Mon-Sat 12:30-3pm (Sat noon-3pm), 6:30-11:30pm; Sun 12:30-3:30pm

Italian value continues to perform at an impressive level. The house special portions of elegantly executed

PANE VINO

323 Haverhill Town Road, NW5 (020 2257 8870). open Mon-Sat 12:30-3:30pm

home cooking and warm service. The popular antipasti buffet is practically a meal in itself, while the classics (osso bucco, chicken milanese) are as rustic as the wine list. Highly recommended.

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Top family-run restaurant

To enjoy that welcoming feel, follow the guide to

Evening Standard Wednesday 11 June 2008

Six chefs compete to be best in London... and all are British

ELLEN WIDDUP

AN ALL-BRITISH line-up of top chefs will go head to head for a prestigious restaurant award.

For the first time in the 10-year history of the London Restaurant Awards, all six nominees vying for the title of outstanding London chef are homegrown.

The most course of rabbit hole is the perennial Soho favourite has a warm atmosphere in keeping with the gentle comfort of its wicker dated decor. The cosy, rustic Metcalfs cooks up home-made Umbrian specialities such as succulent agnolotti (small ravioli) in a tomato and beef sauce, simple but delicious, and classic strips of calf's liver with onions and sprouts. All are executed with absolute gusto and there's a great all-Italian wine list.

THE RIVER CAPE Thames River, Riverside Road, W6 (020 7286 4200). open Mon-Sat 12:30-3:30pm; Sun 12:30-3:30pm

Debate rages on about the north side of the river. Yes, prices are high and dishes simply prepared, but it is clear passion goes into sourcing the best raw materials. A simple starter perfectly balances the mackerel with black fig, green and purple peas, and rocket, while the veal chop with lemon zest, rosemary, cherry tomatoes, caribou and Swiss chard is heaven on a plate. There's also a terrific wine list and lovely alfresco tables in summer.

PRICE GUIDE £££ Above £45 £££ £30-£45 £ Under £30

Price ranges are indicative of one two-course à la carte meal, plus tax, a bottle of house wine, coffee, cover charge, service and VAT. Restaurant reviews compiled specially for The Times by Square Meats, for 15 years the London and UK eating-out experts.

Options are based on the experiences of the Square Meats team of reporters and thousands of readers, who are surveyed throughout the year. You can find more reviews and more on our website.

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AND THE NOMINEES

BRITISH RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

Great Queen Street
Hix Oyster & Chop House
Magdalen
Rules
St John
Scott's

FRENCH RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon
Arbutus
Galvin Bistrot Deluxe
Le Gavroche
The Greenhouse
Hibiscus

ITALIAN RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

Locanda Locatelli
Number Twelve
Ristorante Semplice
Theo Randall at the InterContinental
Vasco & Piero's Pavilion
Zafferano

ORIENTAL RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

Opinion is based on the experiences of the Square Meats team of reporters and thousands of readers, who are surveyed throughout the year. You can find more reviews and more on our website.

LOCAL RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

L'Absinthe, Camden
The Carpenter's Arms, W6
Hereford Road, Notting Hill
Market, Camden
Ottolenghi, NI
Upstairs, Brixton

NEW RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

Acorn House
Le Café Anglaise
Cha Cha Moon
Great Queen Street
Hibiscus
Hix Oyster & Chop House
Scott's

BEST BUSINESS LUNCH

Coq d'Argent
Gaucho Grill
The Landau
Lanes
Ooze
The Wolsely

OUTSTANDING LONDON CHEF

Opinion is based on the experiences of the Square Meats team of reporters and thousands of readers, who are surveyed throughout the year. You can find more reviews and more on our website.

value. Nothing not to like about it. **Tonkotsu:** As well as the ramen, the karaage chicken is a must.

FLORENCE KNIGHT (RIGHT) POLPETTO

40 Maltby Street: One of my favourite restaurants in London. Incredible pedigree and a truly great feel for texture and flavour. **Vasco & Piero's Italian Pavilion:** A Soho stalwart. Not up there as a "fashionable" place to go but they do wonderful pasta.

Nathan Mills:

meat, he a selection the l Terni Bre bes Jus wor for se now se Matt Jones:

Koya: My favourite don't think enough ordering from the they go there. It's



2010-2019

By 2011 it was evident that diners were very much taken by the new fashion for sharing plates, and we had to adjust. It was decided to restructure the menu and have no starters or main courses; we simply created a list of dishes of various sizes. It was a hit, especially with our Japanese clients, who always shared antipasti then pasta then main courses.

Of course, our basic philosophy remained unaltered: simple food using three or four ingredients in each dish, and very much based on Umbrian traditions.

New restaurants opening during this period tended to be small, simple places with bare brick walls and an urban feel. At the same time, areas that were once devoid of good-quality restaurants became destination postcodes – Hackney, the East End, Brixton, Bermondsey. As the West End became too expensive for most independent restaurants, they moved east.

At Vasco and Piero's we began to see more and more Chinese customers, especially students and young professionals. They loved the spaghetti with king prawns in particular, and again would order many plates to share.

The advertising and film industries were changing, as the internet transformed the way that they worked. Social-media influencers became almost more important than professional critics. The influencers seem to be much closer to their core audience and share their key values of quality and style. Many restaurants even began to pay such influencers, or give away free meals and drink to them, in order to get them to post a photograph or review of their place.

Alongside the social-media influencers, Tripadvisor has emerged as a crucial source of information for diners. Whereas in the past,



Painting by Giampaolo Tomassetti

food critics and established guide books were assumed to give the best advice on where to eat, now for many people the general public's view is more significant. Whether this is a good thing or not remains to be seen.

Other important sources for young restaurant-goers are now Youtube for videos and Instagram for pictures. A photograph is worth a thousand words: if the food does not look good on Instagram, it becomes harder to attract a new audience.

In 2015 it was decided once again to redecorate the restaurant, but there was no intention to follow trends or become a casual restaurant. A designer was appointed who understood the Umbrian cuisine and way of life. All the fixtures and fittings were imported from Umbria and an Umbrian artist provided paintings.

But sometimes we have tried to reach out beyond central Italy. In 2016 the restaurant was approached by the Japanese chamber of commerce, who proposed that we visit sake houses in Japan and try to create a combination of Italian food and sake, a fusion. This led to the short-lived sake bar in our basement. But it was just too difficult to explain and promote the idea. The restaurant is Italian, and Italian food is what it does best!

Places like Bao, with long queues to sit on benches at a big table and then eat within twenty minutes, are now all the rage. These places may be cheaper, but one is in and out quickly. Young diners do not often want to linger over drinks and chat over dinner. Many people in their twenties do not drink, and many never go to the same restaurant twice. They do not have to, given the great choice in London. From a restaurant's point of view, it has become much harder to maintain long-term, loyal clientele. The millennials may not be the answer to a successful

restaurant, as they are always looking for something new rather than something consistent and stable. The older crowd want stability and consistency in an ever-changing world.

There have been many changes in this last decade in what people drink with, or before, their meals. For example, not that long ago we started importing craft beers from Italy. There are now quite a few specialist breweries in Umbria, and they produce good IPAs, blondes and double malts, all with character.

Prosecco has long been a favourite in Britain, but it really started taking over from champagne at dinner parties after 2008 – but mainly cheap, sweet prosecco. We feel: if you serve prosecco, just make it the best you can afford!

Around the middle of the decade Aperol spritz became hugely popular in the UK, and it has not stopped – even in winter! And the last few years have seen a return of the classic negroni cocktail, now with all sorts of modern twists such as using craft gins or even chocolate shavings.

Talking of gin, we could hardly fail to notice the upsurge in interest in the new versions of this most traditional drink; we now offer a select few of them in fabulous cocktails.

On the food side of things, the most startling change is the big rise in the number of vegans. In 2019 there were 600,000 in the UK alone. For us, this means water-based pasta, plant-based cheese and soya milk. The restaurant is starting to introduce dishes using these ingredients.

So what does the future hold for Vasco and Piero's Pavilion Restaurant? Brexit has been on everyone's minds over the last

four years, and it is slowly reshaping the country. So far, Italians still love to be in London, and we have a continuous stream of young chefs and waiters and waitresses from Italy. Long may it continue.

For some, the future is about creating new 'experiences', such as dining in abandoned warehouses, listening to music that somehow matches the food, and lots of other surprises. There is even a circus restaurant, where they entertain you by flying around your table and landing on it. There are not many of the old independent restaurants left. Many new restaurants have the backing of investment companies and they have deep pockets. But V & P's does not see itself as simply a traditional restaurant: it looks outward, and surveys what is around. Then it takes parts of the new to mix with its Umbrian heritage and keep the stability and consistency in this uncertain world.

The good news is that the last year has seen a revival of Italian restaurants. There is even a church in Mayfair that has been turned into an urban market that specialises in Italian food: casual eateries serving small plates of pasta. It is good to watch this trend, and it creates another boom in Italian food for the next decade.

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion

The Umbrian restaurant combines Italian food with art and cultures

Vasco and Piero, two young immigrants from Umbria and Piedmont, opened the namesake restaurant in the heart of Soho in 1970. With the help of the owner of the renowned art house cinema Academy, the two managed to open their business in the Academy's restaurant, The Pavilion.

The cinema, with designs by the famous architect and photographer Angus McBean, screened iconic black and white films while a piano was playing in the audience. When the Academy was sold, at the end of the '80s, Vasco & Piero's moved across the road and tried to maintain the same atmosphere that had been created by McBean.

They saved the chairs that he had created in 1954 that were a one-piece work of art. The inside décor was changed, and the restaurant was decorated by a house architect, with the aim of giving it a "home feel" and modern look.

The result is a cosy environment, where guests can feel at ease admiring paintings on the walls and eating simple yet delicious meals.

THE UMBRIAN FEEL
Vasco & Piero's focuses on Umbrian cuisine. Paul, the director of the family-run restaurant, welcomed us with a choice of three appetisers among the house specialities. Crostino with chicken liver pate, strips of cured ham and mushrooms; soufflé of broccoli and pecorino with black truffle butter sauce; tuna carpaccio with avocado, red onions and ginger dressing. Despite the latter

not being Umbrian, one admired the simplicity of each dish and the products used for each recipe. For the main course, we were brought handmade pappardelle with Umbrian ragout and hand-rolled gnocchi.

As Paul explained, the heart of the restaurant (and his as well) is still in Umbria. This is reflected by the traditional plates made with genuine ingredients imported from Italy.

ART & CULTURE
Preserving the heritage of the restaurant, Vasco & Piero's hosts paintings of Giampaolo Tomassetti and Christian Furr. Tomassetti is an

Umbrian painter who was in the spotlight because of book illustrations and religious paintings. He later expressed himself through exaggerated and quirky productions inspired by politics.

The second artist, Furr, is an English painter and is the youngest artist who was commissioned to officially paint Queen Elizabeth II.

Their art works are showcased in the restaurant and can be sold to customers.

Finally, the restaurant recently inaugurated a sake bar in the basement, combining two traditions. Customers can try different varieties of the Japanese drink – with the same concept of a wine tasting – pairing them to Italian tapas.

Umbria is depicted through Vasco & Piero's dishes as a region where to enjoy food and relax and is almost an invitation to visit it. The presence of art works makes sure that the restaurant holds to its history and tradition, while the sake bar is looking at the future and the multicultural London.



Vasco and Piero's Pavilion article in *Partnership*, winter 2018

My favourite table

ARTICLES 2009-2019

Michael Palin at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion

The original restaurant used to be above the Academy cinema on Oxford Street, where I would watch films in the 70s. Sometimes only my wife Helen and I were in there. It was a lovely haven. When the Academy closed in the early 80s the restaurant moved to Poland Street. For a while it did business, and then suddenly it began to fill up. The secret of its success is absolute consistency. I've never been disappointed in a meal here. I always bring friends here because it is not pretentious, it hasn't got the baggage of a restaurant living on its reputation. No one comes here to be seen. People come here not to be seen. And if you don't know what to order, Vasco will bring you a sample to taste to help you make up your mind. Everything is very lightly done; there is nothing heavy. I nearly always have the calves' liver, as it's the best in London. Our children come now with their friends. They've sort of inherited it. I hear more news about my children from Vasco than I do from them. It has always felt like a home from home.

I have always had a reasonably balanced diet. There is a word that used to be bandied about in the 50s - "nourishing" - which meant something that kept you going and fed you well. My mother made good steaks. Her liver and onions was just great, but we went out for fish and chips. If you went to a "good" restaurant it meant roast beef or roast lamb with lots of gravy. It was a childhood of my. We never ate Indian food in spite of the fact that my father, I later discovered, had lived in India for a while.

It doesn't know what something is I'll still eat it. I'll eat almost anything as long as it's prepared and cooked well. The strangest food I've ever eaten was a meal in

it was sliced, so it wasn't as bad as I'd imagined. I ate a bull's penis in China. I was the chief guest and I didn't actually know what I was eating. It was only after the meal that my cameraman Nigel said: "You're brave", and proceeded to tell me.

I wasn't put off chips after *A Fish Called Wanda*, though having chips stuffed up your nose is fraught with problems. Real chips just buckle and bend, as we discovered. So we had to make them from silicon. The trouble was that they had quite a rough texture and after three or four takes my nose was sore, so they put Vaseline inside my nostrils. As a result, the chips kept sliding out so I had to master the art of nasal chip control. That's why I look so pained.

The best food I've ever eaten was in Japan. Everything was so exquisitely cooked, and I love sushi. I don't really like eating in America because it is generally a giant platitude of tasteless stuff. There is some way that food has become a status symbol in this country. Food should be about good conversation and good company and good fun. Some restaurants are like sanctuaries of gastronomic achievement; it's like eating in a museum. I tend to go to restaurants that are cheaper and jolly.

I do like dining alone occasionally. When I was writing *American Friends* I'd go for a long city weekend somewhere, like Seville, and get quite used to dining alone. I'd always take a book to the restaurant. A good book and good food go quite well together. And it is a great way of studying human behaviour by observing others, especially if they don't know who you are.

I used to drink a lot of cheap wine. I am more fussy now. But I couldn't order a £100 bottle of wine. It doesn't matter how much money I had. I think that's

Marina O'Loughlin on restaurants
Restaurants
Fri 10 Feb 2017 14:00 GMT

Vasco & Piero's Pavilion, London W1: 'This Soho old-timer is rammed' - restaurant review

No fireworks, no dishes created for social media, no mouthy chefs poncing about: no wonder it's such a success



▲ Vasco & Piero's Pavilion: 'How could you resist a flawless Toblerone semifreddo?' Photograph: Sophia Evans for the Guardian



November 27, 2012

So Who's Paying ? | BBC Meal Blunder

By Witty Banter

Row Brewing Over BBC Meal For Presenters



(<https://thetouchlinetimes.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/intense-public-protection-bbc-logo.jpg>)

A row is brewing over a BBC outing for top news presenters including Fiona Bruce and Huw Edwards for an £800, licence fee-funded group bonding meal in Soho.

Mary Hockaday, head of the BBC newsroom, hosted the event on Monday night for about 20 key stars and staff at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion in London's Soho.

The dinner was held in the restaurant's private room and is thought to have cost about £800. The BBC said it had secured a reasonable group-booking rating for the restaurant, where main course prices range from £15.50 to £23.50, and that those attending were being asked to make a contribution.

However, the timing of the BBC News dinner has been questioned by some corporation staff.

BBC News is also facing budget cuts and 140 post closures as part of the corporation's Delivering

'I'll eat almost anything. I've tried maggots in Mexico and bull's testicles in Spain'

Sanjeev Bhaskar: This Week In: Films: REX FEATURES

11:20AM BST 27 Mar 2012

Eating at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion Restaurant on Poland Street, which the Pythons took me to years ago. It's a busy, family-run Italian which is perfect for our six year-old, who brings anywhere posh into disrepute. vascosfood.com

Watching Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* on DVD. It's one of the greatest anti-war films ever made and shows Peter Sellers at his best.

Reading *The Good, the Bad and the Multiplex* by Mark Kermode. I've always been mad about film and he's an amazing critic. I love the weekly film review podcast he does with Simon Mayo.

That's amore! Kirsten Dunst and Garrett Hedlund stroll hand-in-hand they enjoy a romantic date night at an Italian restaurant

By Louise Saunders

PUBLISHED: 11:39, 19 November 2012 | UPDATED: 14:20, 19 November 2012

After stopping off at the cinema, the couple decided that next on their agenda would be a romantic meal at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion Italian restaurant.

November 2012 2:22 AM, PST | Popsugar.com | See recent Popsugar news»



Kirsten Dunst and Garrett Hedlund only had eyes for each other during a late-night stroll through London last night. The pair shared a bite to eat at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion Italian restaurant then walked arm in arm back to their hotel.

CUSTOMERS' COMMENTS

I only have an hour, but don't tell my guest

I am about to fire the person I am meeting, so I thought I would give him a nice lunch first

I am coming again tonight but don't tell my wife, I was here for lunch aswell

I will do anything, anything...to get the film right

I am meeting my ex-wife, so please put me in a corner as there will be a lot of shouting

I am having the first course with one client then I will pretend to go and come back for the second course with another client

I like my spinach cooked for 30 seconds only

I want to eat my penne so that the first one is undercooked and last one is perfectly cooked

In December, I only eat asparagus when in season. I will have the avocado

Do you do pizza?

We had our first date here and have come here every week ever since.

I can't stand garlic, I can't stand pasta, I hate tomatoes!

Can you cremate the steak?

We had our first date here and have come here every week ever since

Let me just go through the back door and come back, I do not want to see someone in the restaurant

Keep me away from that guy in the corner I

don't know what my guest looks like

My guest always complains, so just ignore him

Can you make the vegetables soft?

Can you tell that table to be quieter; and the kitchen is really noisy too?

Can I have a man's portion of soup? Can I have a straw for my wine?

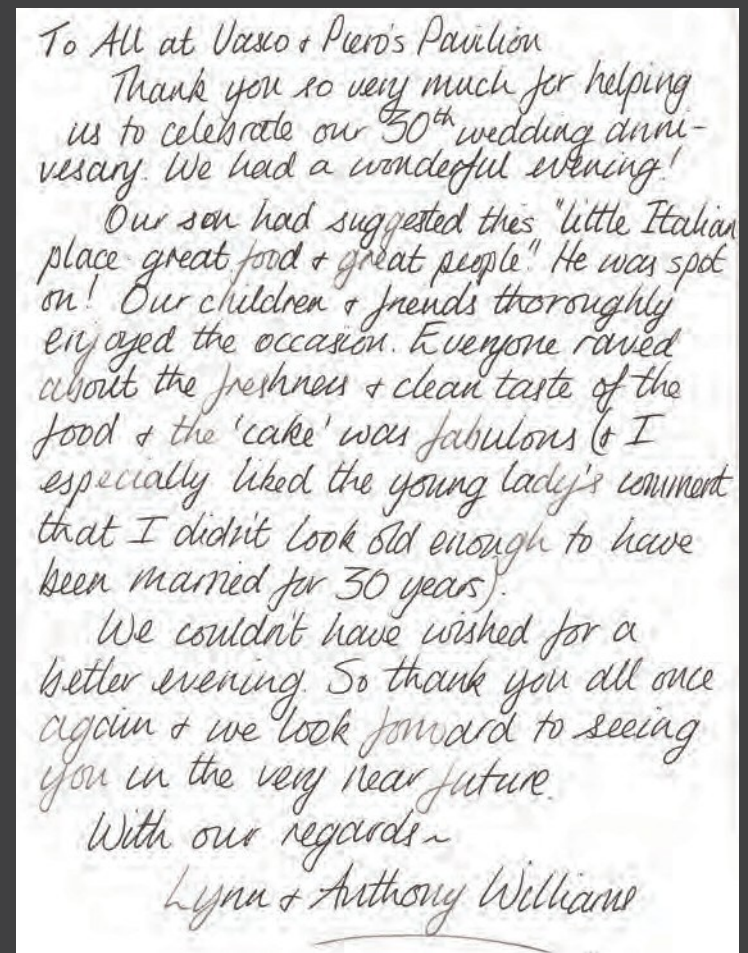
Can I have another pasta for dessert?

I've grown some chillis. I call them Vasco's chillis Just feed me!

This is not very Italian!

I can't stop looking at that painting

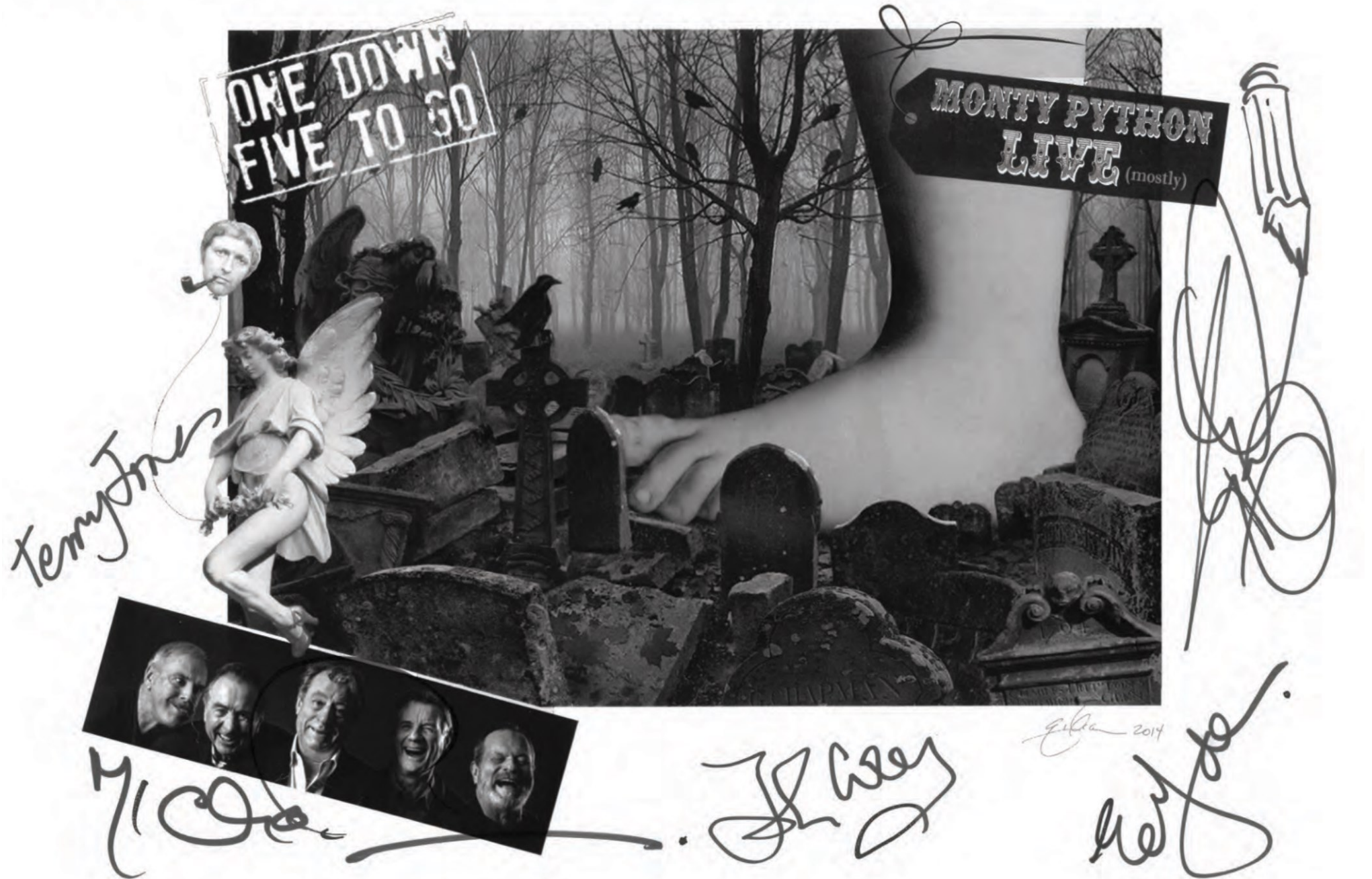
Can I have again what I had at lunchtime? The last time we came here was 35 years ago Any tabasco for the pasta?



To All at Vasco & Piero's Pavilion
Thank you so very much for helping us to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. We had a wonderful evening!
Our son had suggested this "little Italian place great food & great people". He was spot on! Our children & friends thoroughly enjoyed the occasion. Everyone raved about the freshness & clean taste of the food & the 'cake' was fabulous (& I especially liked the young lady's comment that I didn't look old enough to have been married for 30 years).
We couldn't have wished for a better evening. So thank you all once again & we look forward to seeing you in the very near future.
With our regards ~
Lynn & Anthony Williams

Letter of thanks from Lynn and Anthony Williams

To/ VASCO & PIERO



Autographs of the Monty Python team for the 'Monty Python Live (mostly) - One down five to go' show

FOOD TRENDS IN THE LAST 50 YEARS AND HOW V&P ADAPTED

1970s

The *Daily Mail* waxed lyrical about pasta primavera, which was being served in New York's Le Cirque. This was pasta with spring vegetables. It sounded so healthy and V&P's started creating the dish, too. However, in the USA they added lots of cream, and cream was everywhere in the UK as well. Veal was still served with a mushroom sauce made with cream, and rabbit was served in mustard and cream. This was alongside the prawn cocktail, which was still very popular.

V&P's had a buffet for salads as well as a dessert trolley.

Warm goat's cheese was a big thing, and calf's liver was and still is one of our bestselling dishes.

Crostino of chicken livers, ham and marinated mushrooms is still a great starter.

Quiche was the height of sophistication, so, looking for something with plenty of eggs, we introduced a frittata as a starter, a type of Italian omelette.

The Roux brothers were considered the gods of cooking. The Italian restaurateurs were considered the gods of service, fun and love.

1980s

This was the age of nouvelle cuisine. Our plates got smaller and our prices got higher. Risotto milanese arrived in London, so V&P's followed the trend.

By the late 1980s⁶⁶ bruschette, different toppings on lightly toasted bread served as starters, were everywhere. By the 1990s we were doing the bread run: dashing to Umbria at the weekends to buy the



The popular burrata

local bread and selling it in the restaurant on Monday lunchtime.

Beef was served with green peppercorn sauce.

Pancakes were loved in this decade, and we began doing pancakes filled with fresh fruit and cream and served with amaretto and crushed amaretti biscuits.

1990s

The new wave of modern British cuisine was seen everywhere, from Alastair Little to Anthony Worrall Thompson. Marco Pierre White was leading a march, but Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver eventually took over. It was the time when Gary Rhodes created good British food which people copied at dinner parties. It became fashionable to cook.

Sundried tomatoes were suddenly in most dishes.

Vegetarian burgers came on the scene, and we baked layers of aubergine with mozzarella and tomato sauce, la parmigiana.

The River Café was opened, putting high-class Italian food on the map. Pasta was considered a great word, and olive oil and balsamic vinegar were on everything.

Things became lighter, and people started to think about food from a health point of view.

Tiramisu became a big thing in 1990s London, and there were always competitions between the best.

Quick cooking such as grilling was getting more popular than slow stews and so on.

BSE led to a shift away from beef for a while.

Rucola – rocket – became a buzzword among restaurants. No establishment worth its salt could have a menu without rocket salad. Parmesan shavings were a great trend. Steamed asparagus seemed naked without shavings of parmesan.

2000

The food of Japan started influencing menus. We put on carpaccio of tuna with avocado, red onions and ginger dressing.

Avocado was seen as a superfood and was everywhere – in California-influenced salsas, smashed on toast for breakfast or paired with the new discovery quinoa.

2010

Black was the new black in the decade of 2010, and black food became ubiquitous. Blackened cod, which first came to prominence in the 1980s, made a comeback. Then you had squid ink in risotto. Squid ink to colour ravioli. Squid ink to dress white fish dishes. Squid ink to colour tagliatelle. And we even had black rice and black butter.

The trends seem to be: either super-simple food in a super-simple environment, such as a street food market in a converted church; or super-complicated food in a three-star Michelin setting.

Cocktails created by mixologists are a must for all good restaurants. Smoke, fire and dazzle.

Vegans are growing in number. In 2019 there were 600,000 in the UK.

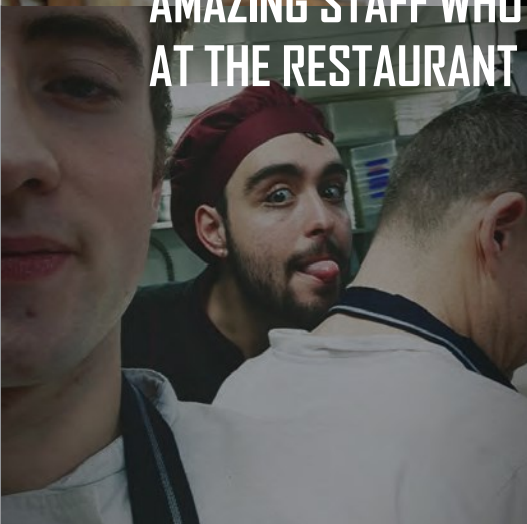
We stick to our Umbrian heritage and keep it simple, using the freshest of ingredients.



The staff



AND 'UN GRAZIE SPECIALE' TO OUR
AMAZING STAFF WHO MAKE EVERY DAY
AT THE RESTAURANT A SPECIAL ONE



Five decades of Vasco and Piero's Pavilion have now passed. Sometimes we worry whether the restaurant is still relevant to old and new generations of Soho.

The restaurant only thrives if local workers and inhabitants use the place, as their 'canteen' – canteen for a variety of media folk, who still dine out regularly. It is important that people feel it's their home away from home, their office away from the office and their oasis away from the chaos of the world beyond our doors.

People are investing in artificial intelligence for restaurant cooking and serving. A restaurant then becomes a place to just eat and go. That is what Vasco never wanted and nor do the people involved in the restaurant. Vasco always tells the team, make the customer your friend and they will not go anywhere else.

The future is, as it always has been, to be a neighbourhood restaurant serving simple Umbrian cuisine to friends.





Vascoosfood.com