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ALL IS WELL

manufactured from scratch

Newly opened Manifattura wows with house-made pasta and dishes inspired by Italy's culinary traditions.

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If you're a fan of Aperitivo—a charming wine bar quaintly situated on Santa Barbara's Haley Street—then you'll absolutely adore its new sister restaurant, Manifattura. And if you've not yet had the pleasure of visiting either, you now have two incredible spots to add to your must-try list.

It's a cold and rainy day in Santa Barbara as I approach Manifattura, but when I step inside, the warmth is palpable. It feels like one of those restaurants that you have the pleasure of stumbling upon by sheer happenstance and are immediately glad you did. As any avid restaurant goer knows, the lighting sets the tone for your evening and is arguably just as important as the first bite of food. The lighting inside Manifattura does not disappoint—muted and moody with dimly lit gold lamps adorning each table—it's just low-key enough for a first date and just lively enough for an evening spent with dear friends over shared wine.

The interior of the restaurant immediately strikes me as Manhattan-esque. In fact, after a few drinks, you'd likely be able to convince me that I was sitting inside a swanky joint in the Big Apple itself. Perhaps the design is an intentional ode to Manifattura's executive chef and co-owner, Brian Dodero—a Santa Barbara local who matured his culinary craft in Italian restaurants throughout Manhattan. Brian teamed up with Rebecca Fox of Fox & Fields Interior Design and Miramar Building Co. to craft a space where walnut, brass and terrazzo mesh together to achieve a harmonious blend of midcentury and vintage design.

Brian met Manifattura's sommelier and co-owner, Andrea Girardello, when the two were working together at the Coral Casino at Four Seasons Santa Barbara. They bonded over their mutual love for food, wine and all things Italy, and today own and operate both Aperitivo and Manifattura.



TAGLIATELLE DEGLI UMARELLES



EXECUTIVE CHEF BRIAN DODERO





BURRATA PUGLIESE, MELANZANE IN AGRODOLCE, "PIZZA" BIANCA

I had the pleasure of meeting Andrea when dining at Manifattura. You can immediately tell he's passionate about what he does. His enthusiasm radiates as he makes his way up and down the restaurant, chatting with guests and offering suggestions. I ask him about the meaning behind the name of the restaurant, and he takes his time to explain the true nature behind the Italian expression. He points to my blouse and explains that *manifattura* is an Italian term used to describe the true quality and essence of something. He paints a picture: imagine it's the '50s and you walk into a tailor shop and start selecting the fabric for your next blouse. You'll likely glide your hands across each fabric to assess its quality. Well, if the fabric is to your liking, it's safe to say you're pleased with its *manifattura*. I come to understand the expression to mean the entire makeup of something—not just its separate parts. He also explains the word directly translates to “manufacturing” in English and that “mani” means hand. The name is fitting, as the restaurant makes pasta by hand daily and they pay mind to the entire makeup of each dish.

When our drinks arrive, I'm immediately impressed. I sample the Hugo Spritzer with house-made elderflower syrup and prosecco. My plus one, Atticus, has what's listed as the Manifattura Negroni with juniper-infused agave wine and vermouth. The Hugo Spritzer is light, refreshing and tastes almost identical to sweet-and-sour candy—the kind I enjoyed as a kid. I find myself reaching over the table multiple times to sneak another sip of the negroni, as it's the first of its kind that I'm able to enjoy without recoiling at its bitterness. This negroni is different; it's sweet and mimics the flavor of cherries.

Up next, we devour our selected *spuntini*—Pizza Bianca and Burrata Pugliese. Don't let the name fool you: the Pizza Bianca is the name for their house-made focaccia bread, which mimics that of pizza dough, and their burrata is freshly flown in from Puglia. I'm pleasantly surprised to encounter the simplicity of each dish. They arrive without an overreliance on excess garnishes—just quality ingredients married together to provide quality taste. The focaccia is crispy, airy and salted to perfection.

I can still hear the satisfying crunch the crust makes when split open. The burrata arrives nestled in a shallow bath of olive oil and adorned only with sea salt. It tastes of fresh cream and the daydreams of Italian vacations past.

The menu is petite and uncomplicated, and all of the entrées consist of the restaurant's house-made pasta, so come hungry for carbs. We decide on the Gnudi al Pesto Vibrante and Tagliatelle degli Umarellles. The gnudi features delicate ricotta dumplings doused in pesto and topped with breadcrumbs. It's unique and pleasantly different from traditional pesto pastas. The pesto sauce is vibrant, fragrant and the star of the dish. The ricotta dumplings hiding underneath are tender and delicious. As for the tagliatelle, it's slow-cooked to perfection. In fact, Andrea tells us that the process takes about six hours from start to finish, which is ironic, as it only takes us a few minutes to devour. The best way to describe this dish would be Bolognese sauce without the tomato paste. It's rich but not heavy, creamy and rustic, and gets better with each bite. It's an absolute must. And although Andrea modestly shares that “we're not trying to reinvent the wheel; we're just trying to make really good Italian food,” I beg to differ. I think aside from Manifattura crafting exceptionally delicious Italian food, they're also crafting unique pasta dishes that are far from standard.

If you take away one tip after reading this article, let it be this: do not skip dessert. The Gelato al Limoncello may appear unassuming, but don't indulge in those “we have ice cream at home” thoughts. Instead, indulge in this lemon gelato. Topped with bits of limoncello confection and a lemon curd center, this gelato instantly reminds me of the limoncello-flavored almonds I ate religiously in Italy. If you're not particularly a fan of lemon-flavored desserts, perhaps you'll hit the pan on the Baba al Rum—a boozy, rum-soaked Neapolitano sponge cake and a dish I plan on ordering during my next visit, because I'll absolutely be going back.

Picturesque in nature, intimate in setting and impressive in culinary prowess, Manifattura is more than just another Italian spot. It's a community gathering space that feels swanky yet familial, and it's your next favorite restaurant.*