



## How the San Giorgio Café with Filippo La Mantia came to be

D'Uva takes part in the project of the Giorgio Cini Foundation  
on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice

One morning in June a couple of years ago, we received a phone call at the office. It was Maria Novella Benzoni, the person in charge of the managing and coordinating the physical spaces of the Giorgio Cini Foundation, who wanted to meet us to explore the possibility of a collaboration for opening the monumental complex where the Foundation is situated to visitors. It all grew out of that meeting, which marked the beginning of the collaboration for developing a reception system for visitors to the Island of San Giorgio, including ticket office, bookshop, merchandising, signage, guided tours, video guides in Italian, English, French, German, Spanish and Russian.

After a few months' work, Novella asked me if I was also interested in presenting a proposal for the management of the island's café/restaurant. Without thinking twice I answered that I was, and to open a restaurant worthy of this place I thought of commissioning the eno-gastronomic proposal from Filippo La Mantia, the Sicilian host and cook who has developed an original culinary project full of feeling and innovation.

The San Giorgio Café was preceded by a temporary summer substitute: the San Giorgio Mobile Bistrot, a vintage Ape three-wheeler van which we opened for the debut at the 2018 Venice Biennale of the Vatican Chapels (10 chapels designed by internationally famous architects), the Vatican Pavilion on the island of San Giorgio.

Many people ask me: what have you got to do with restaurants? The question makes sense, because D'Uva is mainly a digital Interpretation laboratory which has collaborated since 1959 with museums and churches to offer interactive, personalised experiences through audio guides, mobile apps, multimedia totems, guided tours, ticket offices, bookshops and museum services: a combination of minds with differing passions for technology, music, computers, design, mechanics, architecture, art history, working to develop innovative museum projects. We are new to the catering world, but have a consolidated presence in the cultural heritage industry, in highly prestigious places such as: the Basilica of St. Mark's, The Doge's Palace, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, La Fenice Theatre, in Venice; the cathedrals of Milan, Florence, Siena, Pisa; the Holy Convent of St. Francis, in Assisi; the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, in Rome; the excavations of Pompeii and those of Herculaneum.

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I grew up in the company; when I was a little girl I used to come into this world of electronics and commentary and watch fascinated as my father designed technological instruments or recorded the voices of international actresses, whom I then amused myself by listening to, slotting a coin into those first video guides. Or I travelled with him, happy on those long car journeys when he would tell me about how, at just 18 years of age, he had presented himself to Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, then Archbishop of Milan, to show him the first audio guides, which the Cardinal had then had installed in the Cathedral of Milan.

Then I contributed to transforming the company into the laboratory it is today, where we experiment, seek out innovations, produce commentaries and multimedia experiences and plan and manage museum services, also the cafeterias. So, when they ask me what I have to do with restaurants, I answer that this is a museum cafeteria which is part of an integrated reception project commissioned by the Giorgio Cini Foundation for visitors to an island-cum-museum, the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.

So, many thanks to the Giorgio Cini Foundation for having entrusted this project to us; thanks to the General Secretary, Pasquale Gagliardi, to Maria Novella Benzoni, Renata Codello, Massimo Altieri, Francesca Salatin, Emilio Quinté and all the people from the Foundation who have supported and put up with us in these months. Thanks to Vanni, who has done everything to make this project possible, to Anna Maria D'Angelo who has helped me this time too, and all the people who work at D'Uva. Without them, all this wouldn't have been possible. Thanks to Filippo La Mantia for embarking on this adventurous voyage with us, to Paolo Richelli and Anastasiya Sharova, with whom we created the interior design project. Thanks to Electrolux for having created the restaurant kitchen, to Reggiano for supplying the lighting, to the Gruppo Lunelli and the Benedictine Monks of San Giorgio for having created a particular wine-list with us, to Monica Ripamonti for looking after the details, and to Kikka Ricchio for being there for me all these months. Thanks so much to everybody, the professionals and the companies that have contributed to the creation of the San Giorgio Café with Filippo La Mantia.

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