

## Food Talk: *A little slice of Venice*

Luna d'autunno is one of Phnom Penh's most chic Italian eateries. **Liz Ledden** chats to co-owner and manager **Fabrizio Sartor** about what makes his restaurant and menu so unique.



**Fabrizio Sartor** Proud to stock purely Italian wines



**Evening in the garden** The perfect spot for an intimate dinner

VENETIAN FABRIZIO SARTOR made the move to Cambodia a year-and-a-half ago after previously working in Berlin for three years. Searching for "greater opportunity," he says he found what he was looking for in Phnom Penh, following the helpful suggestion of his friend Bemelli Gino of the Luna group.

"It felt like the right moment for business in Cambodia," says Fabrizio. "I came for one restaurant, now we have two, and have plans for another one," he adds.

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### ■ LUNA FAMILY

The brainchild of a small group of Italian friends headed up by Bemelli Gino, Luna d'autunno is a successful restaurant chain in both Vietnam and Cambodia. A love of the region led the group to set up the chain in Southeast Asia, according to Fabrizio.

The first restaurant opened in Hanoi eight years ago, followed by Mui Ne (also in Vietnam), Phnom Penh, Saigon and Siha-noukville. A Siem Reap branch is currently in the planning stages and due to open in a year, says Fabrizio.

### ■ UNIQUE DISHES

With a background as a chef, Fabrizio is clearly passionate about Italian cuisine. He has personally trained his kitchen staff in the art of cooking, northern Italian style.

"Luna has a lot of signature dishes that other restaurants here don't have," he says.

One of these specialties, originating from Fabrizio's home town, is cuttlefish in squid ink sauce with polenta (US\$7). The sole e luna di tonno (filled pasta with fresh tuna) at US\$9.40 is another special dish at the restaurant. Though loosely based on a Venetian dish, it is a concoction of his own, Fabrizio explains.

Homemade gnocchi and an extensive pizza menu are other points of pride. While he doesn't want to boast he has the best pizzas in Cambodia, Fabrizio maintains his customers often tell him that he does.

### ■ SOPHISTICATED AMBIENCE

"An Italian atmosphere in an international way," is how Fabrizio describes Luna. The owner of I Ching Décor is a business partner, he says, and explains the design company has transformed the restaurant's interior into a highly chic, minimalist room with a sophisticated ambience.

A glass-fronted wine room houses only Italian wines imported by the restaurant. Fabrizio proudly explains there are wines at Luna that you cannot find anywhere else in Cambodia.

Though the majority of Luna's clientele are expats, Fabrizio is noticing more Cambodian customers, who he says are eager to try new things. While the customer base is changing, so

too are the restaurant's initiatives. Live music acts have been recently introduced, along with a weekend brunch buffet, with all-you-can-eat Mediterranean cuisine for US\$12 per person.

One of the biggest hurdles he is trying to overcome is training the staff, he says. "Although, I get much satisfaction when they understand and do it properly," he adds. On the more positive side, he believes that the country is on the way up and improving. "Now is the right time to have a business here," he says, a sentiment being echoed by many of Phnom Penh's foreign business owners right now.

**Luna d'autunno**, 6c Street 29, Tel: 023 220 895 [www.lunadautunno.com](http://www.lunadautunno.com)



**Chefs in action** Luna's open air kitchen