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A Home for the Holidays

The de Magistris family's renovated-yet-rustic Vermont getaway is where everything – and at this time of year, everyone – comes together.

By *Alexandra Hall*

Photographs by *Kristin Teig*

It wasn't the house that Leon de Magistris was buying 10 years ago, when he ponied up an offer for a tiny nondescript bungalow in Woodstock, Vermont. Rather, it was the land around it – and its soaring mountains. "It reminded me of Campania, Italy, where I grew up," he says. "I wanted that for my family here."

Fast-forward a decade, and his family is, indeed, very much "here" – particularly at the holidays, when all of them pile into cars at their Boston-area homes and make the three-hour drive to the snowy, picturesque retreat. De Magistris, who owns a hair salon in Belmont, has three sons, now grown up. The brothers work in the two restaurants they own together, Dante in Cambridge and Il Casale in Belmont.

"During the rest of the year, I can usually only stay one night, because I've got to get back to my kitchens," says Dante de Magistris, the chef at both restaurants. "But at Christmas-time we stay two nights. It's one of the only times all year when we get to relax together for that long."

Not that he does very much relaxing, even in such an idyllic setting. From the moment they set foot in the light-filled, open kitchen, he and brothers Damian and Filippo are usually found cooking, cleaning, plating, or serving. Their holiday menu is, after all, a fairly epic one; since they were kids, the trio has always rolled out its (creatively tweaked) version of



the traditional Italian feast of seven fishes – and always for a crowd of no less than 20. The meal features classic dishes that Dante has modernized, much the way his father has refurbished the now-sprawling, upgraded house.

"This place really wasn't much when we first got it," says Leon. "It used to be an old ski lodge that was in pretty rough shape, and next to it was a barn full of horses." Now, that barn is one of the only elements on the property that hasn't changed dramatically. After settling in for a year or two, Leon got down to imagining how to make the most of the 2,200-square-foot home's surroundings. "A feeling of being outside even when you're inside – that was what we were after," he explains. "I'm sort of a frustrated architect. I can't draw, but

COUNTRY STYLE

The rustic dining table (left) is ready for an Italian feast. Above, from left: The de Magistris family – here, Filippo and his daughter Giovanna, patriarch Leon, Damian, and Dante – spends lots of time in the well-equipped kitchen.



knew exactly what I wanted.” So he brought in a nearby architect, Art Gardner. “I only wanted to work with local people,” Leon says, “to get an authentic Vermont feel.” The two came up with a plan for an addition nearly half the size of the original home, with one side made completely of glass. “The view is so central,” Leon says. “Now I can be in any of the front rooms and I feel like I’m out in the mountains.”

Another priority was the kitchen, which anchors the open living and dining rooms. The soapstone countertops are where Dante stuffs escarole with anchovies, walnuts, and raisins,

and Damien peels garlic for cuttlefish with saffron and zucchini. “These days, I do a lot of the prep beforehand,” says Dante, stirring a pot of angel-hair pasta. “We used to wake up at 6 in the morning to start cooking, but now we’ll do it at the restaurant the day before and bring it with us to finish cooking here.”

In fact, much of the home’s kitchen could double as a restaurant’s. During the renovation, Dante called on Harbour Food

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BUSMAN’S HOLIDAY

Though he’s still behind the stove, chef Dante (above) enjoys a rare two days away from his restaurants at Christmastime (right), cooking for family and friends.





Dante's Angel-Hair Pasta *Aglio e Olio*

SERVES 5

Sea salt

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling**
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced**
- 2 whole dried hot red peppers**
- 7 anchovy fillets (canned)**
- 3 tablespoons salted capers, soaked and rinsed**
- 3 tablespoons golden raisins**
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted**
- 1 pound angel-hair pasta**
- 1 bunch parsley, roughly chopped**

Set a large pot of salted water to boil. Heat a shallow saucepan over low to medium heat. Add the olive oil, garlic, peppers, anchovies, capers, raisins, and pine nuts. Cook mixture for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Don't let the garlic change color; if it starts to brown, reduce the heat.

Boil the pasta in the salted water until al dente, about 3 minutes. Remove the pasta from the water and add to the sauce. Add about a ½ cup of the pasta water and the parsley, and stir to combine. Adjust seasoning, adding salt to taste. Remove the peppers before serving the pasta in bowls with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.





AROUND THE HEARTH

After dessert, the group bundles up, grabs glasses of grappa, and heads out to the flagstone patio, complete with fire pit and mountain views.

Service Equipment in Chelsea to source professional-grade appliances, including the oven and the Liebherr fridge. “A lot of meals have come out of this kitchen,” says Leon, chuckling, from across the room. “It’s where everyone congregates, even when we’re not helping to cook.” He’s seated at a table he had made of reclaimed wood by local artisans.

Patina is a common theme throughout the home. The floors are of random-sized local pine, which lends the look of an old barn. The foyer and floor-to-ceiling fireplace are locally quarried flagstone. The bathroom tiles are antique glass, and the chairs are leather-backed and deep. “The idea was to make it rustic but still very comfortable,” says Leon.

Flagstones were also used outside for the patio and fire pit, where everyone – including Leon’s shepherd, Lula, and border terrier, Bosco – tends to wind up. After the last zeppole has been eaten, the group will grab blankets and glasses of grappa and gather there.

“We’re out here all the time; we use it as often as we can,” says Dante, looking out to the white-gray peaks in the distance. “Even when it snows, we just stay out and build a larger fire. It’s probably just us loving the mountain air or being together telling stories,” he says. “Or both.” ■

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Zeppole di Patate

SERVES 5

3 medium-sized potatoes, boiled, peeled, and riced (1¼ cups)
3 cups bread flour
¾ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup fresh yeast
1½ teaspoons salt
1 egg
⅓ cup cold water
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
½ cup whole milk
¾ cup unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and kept cold
4 cups canola oil, for deep-frying
Holiday nonpareil sprinkles

In a stand mixer, combine the riced potatoes, flour, sugar, yeast, salt, egg, water, and vanilla. Using the dough hook attachment, mix on medium speed for 2 minutes. Adjust the speed to low and, scraping down the sides of the bowl, gradually add the milk. When the mixture resembles a wet dough, add the cold butter a little at a time. Remove the dough and place in a large bowl with a tight lid. Refrigerate overnight.

Divide the dough into 16 pieces using a dough cutter. Roll each piece into a doughnut hole sized ball. Cover the balls with plastic wrap and allow to proof at room temperature for 1 hour.

Deep-fry the balls in 365-degree oil until golden brown. Remove from the oil and drain on paper towels. Roll the fried dough in nonpareils and serve warm or at room temperature.



Cuttlefish Stufato With Saffron and Zucchini

SERVES 5

2 pounds baby cuttlefish (or baby squid), cleaned
2 cloves garlic, peeled and cut in half lengthwise
1 whole dried hot red pepper
1 pinch saffron
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Sea salt
2 tablespoons capers
½ cup dry white wine
1 medium zucchini, julienned
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Juice of half a lemon

Heat a large saute pan over medium-high heat. In a bowl, combine the cuttlefish, garlic, the pepper, saffron, olive oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and capers. Once the pan is extremely hot, add the mixture to the pan and stir continually for 1 minute. Add the wine and allow to reduce by half. Cover the pan with a tight lid, reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the zucchini and allow to simmer for another 2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and mix in the parsley and lemon juice. Serve either hot or chilled.