

city

EVENTS | CULTURE | POLITICS | FOOD

by John Gilchrist and Catherine Caldwell photography by Angel Man

only the best



Centini's anti-pasto platter is the start of great dishes to come.

Customer Appreciation

At Centini, the food is decidedly Italian, but the quality of the service knows no boundaries >>

Chances are, you'll never have to lay a hand on a door handle or move a chair when you visit Centini. You can try to open the big glass-and-chrome door onto Stephen Avenue yourself, but maître d' Gustavo Yelamo will likely beat you to the punch (and dazzle you with his Venezuelan smile at the same time). You might be able to pull a chair out from your table, but sommelier Raul Rodas-Reyes will likely be there to do the job for you (and dazzle you with his Salvadoran smile).

Your only task will be to sit back, relax, select a few items from the food and wine menus (or not, if you'd rather let the pros do it for you) and find the energy to wield your own cutlery. That's your assignment, should you decide to accept it.

The Yelamo/Rodas-Reyes duo handles restaurant service like none other in the city. They, and their expert co-workers, cocoon you in a blanket of care, allowing you to focus on the food, the wine and each other. Want a romantic evening? Centini might be the place.

But what's this about a Latin American service tag team, you ask? Is Centini not an Italian restaurant? True, it is, but it's a "modern" Italian one. And with that comes an international staff that is hired for their skill rather than for their heritage. So relax. Let them do their job. It's remarkable when you find staff so committed to service. In many places, we just hope someone will be able to take our order and deliver something approximating our request in a timely fashion; at Centini, you can ignore those concerns and simply participate in the dining experience.

Soon, rich Italian scents will start to roll out of the open kitchen. Perhaps a waft of cream, black pepper and vodka being reduced into a Romanoff sauce for pasta; maybe the cheesy bite of gorgonzola melting into a creamy smooth glaze; or possibly the meaty bouquet of a 14-ounce veal chop being grilled and sided with an apple-sage jus. It's an olfactory festival at Centini, a place to pluck aromas from the air as top-notch ingredients hit the stove. It's almost as intoxicating as a trip through the long, long list of fine Italian wines.

To us, the minutes between arriving and eating at Centini are used for decompression. The tension escapes from our shoulders, our brows unfurrow and time slows down. Once the antipasto arrives, we're removed from the hustle of Stephen Avenue outside, and when the main courses are delivered, time almost stops. By the end of the evening, we just want to curl up and snooze for a while. Or at least have Yelamo and Rodas-Reyes drive us home.

But what about Fabio Centini, the man who created



Above left: Centini's location inside the Telus Convention Centre has turned out to be a hit.

Above: The pasta platter is truly a feast for the senses.

Left (left to right): Sommelier Raul Rodas-Reyes, owner Fabio Centini and maître d' Gustavo Yelamo.

Fabio Centini is a smiling force of nature whose energy is larger than the room itself.

this eponymous restaurant? He is the uncompromising maestro who conducts the activity in the kitchen and throughout the dining room. He's a smiling (and it's an Italian smile this time) force of nature whose energy is larger than the room itself. Centini (his many fans just know him as Fabio) has been interested in food since he was a child and stood on a kitchen chair to knead pasta. He's a stickler for quality, always on the lookout for primo meats and produce. He searches out ingredients across North America and Europe and works diligently to bring them to his Calgary restaurant. He's unstoppable.

And irrepressibly positive. There are many who thought opening a restaurant in the Telus Convention Centre would never work. But he transformed the space into a successful restaurant with an injection

of colour, aromas and the liveliness of his Italian cuisine. He also added his commitment to quality and service, hired good staff and let them do their jobs. His dining room quickly became a place for business lunches and private dinners, and his banquet room became a sought-after location for events ranging from corporate functions to birthday parties.

Centini — the restaurant — now clicks along like the well-olive-oiled machine that it is. It's a prime downtown Italian restaurant, a dining destination for locals and visitors alike. And a place where you may never have to lay a hand on a door handle. 🍴

Centini Restaurant and Lounge is located in the Telus Convention Centre at 160 8th Avenue S.E., 403-269-1600.