

Soul of Sicily

For Italian-Americans, it was the moment when the meatballs got big. We speak of the 1950s, when at least some of the thousands of Italian immigrants who had fled New York City from impoverished regions of Italy finally began to see the powwow fruits of their sacrifice. Prosperity was within reach, and they expected their meal at the neighborhood restaurant to express that.

"You're seeing more protein at the table now, because they can afford it," said the chef Mario Carbone, who on Friday plans to open a restaurant, Carbone's, on Park Avenue, a neighborhood that, like New York, has changed. A son of the painter and film director Julian Schnabel, the servers will wear vintage-style vests and mesados covered by the designer Zac Posen.

At their restaurants, Farm and Torrisi Italian Specialties, Mr. Carbone, his fellow chef Rich Torrisi and their business partner, Jeff Zalaznick, have in recent years tried to dispel the notion of any wedge quibbles about "authenticity" and to discover the pleasures of classic red-sauce cuisine. Carbone will get rolling on Thompson Street in Greenwich Village, in a space that used to house Rocca, which specialized in that kind of fare for its clientele of Italian-American professionals. The menu, the music, the uniforms, the decor and even the servers' banter with customers — will be engineered to conjure up the feeling of a lively night downtown, circa 1950.



When you look at the menu at this restaurant, it's going to look very familiar, which is the goal."

— Mr. Carbone

Then again, you might say it's the middle of the last century as interpreted by clive players from the early 1950s: the costumes may not be the real thing, but the food will be served by Vicki Kehinde, a son of the painter and film director Julian Schnabel, and the servers will wear vintage-style vests and mesados covered by the designer Zac Posen.

The food, too, will get a 21st-century makeover. As Mr. Zalaznick pointed out, Italian-American fare is "still around, but hasn't been given the love and care that it deserves."

So, yes, there will be lasagna with clams, and latkes for dascali, and Caesar salad, and various permutations of piccata, Marsala and carpaccio. They're embracing what it means to be American. They're like: "I'm going to show off. We're going to have meatballs tonight, and they're huge!"

