

HOME + DESIGN

DEPARTURES

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/
A FEAST OF
COLOR

p108





Nine months and \$3.2 million later, the iconic Il San Pietro di Positano hotel, on Italy's Amalfi Coast, has built one of the most future-forward kitchens on earth.



From top: The Tamagnini meat slicer, used for local prosciutto and culatello, was made in Parma, Italy, exclusively for the hotel; executive chef Alois Vanlangenaeker stands in Zass's main cooking area, on the upper level of the two-floor space; Koma conditioning cabinets in the kitchen store bread dough.



IS THIS

THE MOST

TECHNOLO

GICALLY
ADVANCED

RESTAURANT
KITCHEN IN
THE WORLD?

From top: A designated pasta-boiling station in the new kitchen of the hotel's Zass restaurant; ceramic tiles from Salerno, Italy-based producer Fornace De Martino line the walls between prep stations; Zass's logo is etched into a stainless steel counter. The custom-made islands and counters were crafted by Marrone, a cabinet and appliance manufacturer near Venice.



Chef Alois Vanlangenaeker Hopes So...

BY LEE MARSHALL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEA ANOUCHINSKY

One of the more unusual ways of checking one's appearance is to open a Coldline fridge in the kitchen of the hotel Il San Pietro di Positano, on Italy's Amalfi Coast. There I was, looking slightly puzzled between a small forest of pink octopus tentacles and a mound of inky, marbled cuttlefish. It beat using my smartphone as a vanity case.

Why would a refrigerator be lined with mirrors? The answer is obvious to kitchen designer Andrea Viacava, who began his career creating sterile environments for hospital operating rooms: "It's so you can see all around, in order to be able to clean it thoroughly." For the same reason, Viacava made sure those mirrored fridge linings had no right angles.



Two of the four Marrone islands in the main cooking area of the kitchen, equipped to prepare pasta, entrées, meat, and fish

They curve around edges and corners. That way, there's nowhere for dirt to hide.

Il San Pietro's new kitchen is the most substantial improvement made by brothers and third-generation co-owners Vito and Carlo Cinque. They began working in the partially rock-hewn hotel on a temporary basis in 1990, at the ages of 25 and 28, respectively, when their uncle Salvatore Attanasio was elected mayor of Positano. At the time, Attanasio was running the hotel with his sister Virginia, Vito and Carlo's mother. (She's now a co-owner along with her sons.) Six years later, after Attanasio's death, Vito became Il San Pietro's full-time hotel manager and Carlo its account manager.

Vito personally oversaw the nine-month kitchen renovation with the help of Viacava,

who spent much of his childhood in his father's restaurant near Genoa. (Interior designer Fausta Gaetani, a Positano resident associated with Il San Pietro since its 1970 inauguration, also contributed.) Viacava worked closely with 19 professional kitchen equipment companies, including the Veneto, Italy-based kitchen design and appliance specialist Marrone Custom Cooking, to create the two-level space, which is used exclusively for the fine-dining restaurant Zass (Carlino, the hotel's casual, beachside spot,



Coldline refrigerators are set to different temperatures for storing a variety of ingredients, from Amalfi Coast fish like gilt-head bream (33.8-37.4°F) to meats, such as lamb, rabbit, and chicken (35.6-39.2°F).

has its own kitchen), and added technological tweaks seen in few other hotel kitchens. The lower floor is carved out of the rock to which the hotel is anchored. Among the Marrone-branded gear serving Il San Pietro's chefs is a refrigerator reserved for chopping boards and a metal counter kept at a steady 28.4°F for preparing seafood. To keep the kitchen clean, an automated system kicks in at 2 A.M., sealing off the entire area and filling it with ozone, a natural cleaning agent that protects surfaces and eliminates all but the strongest odors.

Recycling and energy saving are at the heart of the project. Refrigerators and cold chambers generate energy that is used to heat water in the hotel. So far the hotel has seen an 85 percent reduction in waste and a 25 percent lower energy bill, not to mention overall environmental benefits. Asked to compare the reborn workspace with its previous incarnation—the kind of standard, well-equipped luxury-hotel kitchen that many chefs dream of being let loose in—executive chef Alois Vanlangenaeker likens it to "the difference between a Ferrari and a Fiat 500."



Zass's breads, including rolls, brioches, and croissants, are baked in Miwe ovens from Germany.

For Vito, this is the ideal conclusion to a process that began when he turned around the hotel's main restaurant by appointing Belgian-born Vanlangenaeker in 2002, the same year the restaurant was awarded its Michelin star. But it was only in 2013, with the unveiling of a renovation of the restaurant that took place over two years, that Vito felt he was getting close to his vision of offering hotel guests "a 360-degree fine-dining experience."

Il San Pietro's \$3.2 million eco-kitchen represents the final lap of a journey that Vito says



A butcher block crafted from black locust wood is built into a workstation. It was made by Euroceppi, based in Albino, Italy.

is all about creating the optimum conditions to express his and Vanlangenaeker's common food philosophy. "The cooking and the experience of eating has to be true and real," he says. "Guests are able to see where all the ingredients come from and where they are grown in



"It's the difference between a Ferrari and a Fiat 500," says Vanlangenaeker about his new workspace.



Top: Zass chefs prepare breads, vegetables, and olive oil. Bottom, from left: Zass's lobster salad with chickpeas and fennel; risotto with Burrata and shrimp-and-chestnut carpaccio; roasted redfish with yellow tomato sauce; crème brûlée with buffalo yogurt, Campari, crispy pear, and ginger.

the gardens, and then they can watch the food being prepared. Everything about the dining experience is transparent and honest."

For hotel guests, the novelty is that the space goes beyond the token peephole window from the dining room into toque-land or the clichéd chef's table far from the kitchen to offer guests full backstage access. Here there are two windows, both offering wide-screen views. Have a word with the concierge and you can stroll through the basil, cherry tomatoes, and radicchio in Carlino's kitchen garden with Zass maître d' Pasquale Fusco before heading into the Zass kitchen to catch Vanlangenaeker at his busy best (or worst) from a true chef's table. Designed for just two people, it's actually more of a chef's shelf—a pullout extension of Vanlangenaeker's personal prep surface, handcrafted from olive wood, in the thick of the action.



Brothers Vito (left) and Carlo Cinque, who oversee the day-to-day business of the hotel and restaurants along with their mother, Virginia

Vito seems both proud of his new *creatura* (a word meaning both "creature" and "baby" in the dialect of Campania) and a little shocked by the audacity of it all, not to mention the expense. When I suggest this, he laughs before replying, "You need a calm, tranquil family setup to be able to contemplate something like this, or you'd never take the risk." But for Vito, it's this point that makes a hotel like Il San Pietro—and other Amalfi Coast friends like Antonio Sersale at Le Sirenuse or Crescenzo Gargano at the Hotel Santa Caterina—so unusual. "The Amalfi Coast *hôtellerie* world is really quite special," he says. "It's based on *serenità familiare*, family harmony, rather than global investments." ♦