



Checking

Food ★ Fun ★ Frolic
By Bill Whitman



Castagnola Success Story

"A legend in our time!" That's Mario Castagnola, owner operator of the Lobster House Restaurant chain which's been spreading over the Southland over the past few years.

To get the full impact of the giant steps Mr. Castagnola has made with his chain of fine restaurants, one must first see the "cubicle" in which he started as a humble "fish peddler" in Santa Barbara, hardly much larger than an over-sized broom closet. And this original cinder-block section still stands down there on the beach.

Of course by now it's much larger, having built onto the original so as to accommodate his ever-growing patronage. The small beginning structure however, helps Mario to remember how he got started in this perilous business, launching him into a fantastic career.

Exact figures as to the number of successful dinner houses now carrying the Castagnola name we don't have, but where ever you find them you'll also find the Midas touch.

We first came in contact with Mario when he opened his initial South Bay spot in the King Harbor Marina area of Redondo Beach, The Lobster House, a huge rambling

affair loaded with nautical nostalgia and with a view that won't quit.

Next came simply Castagnola's in the very center of Fisherman's Wharf, also in Redondo Beach, and once again with a breath-taking view of the Pacific with all its coming and goings of small water craft.

Then there's another one over in Pasadena and still another in Marina Del Rey, the exact chronology of which escapes us as to "which came first" but in any event, they're all there.

There were plans at one time for another Lobster House in Hawaii and whether or not this jelled we can't say but the fact still remains, Mario Castagnola parlayed a small fish business into a million dollar enterprise, and now, in place of a small fishing boat (which we presume he once had), he boasts a beautiful sleek pleasure yacht, The Swift, which he obtained from James Cagney. And a wonderful "boat" it is!

The quality of the Castagnola Cuisine may be attested to by a recent letter we received from reader Bill McCabe and his wife who conferred accolades sprinkled with all the superlatives in the book for the Lobster

House special before 7 p.m. dinners and the superb service they've experienced on numerous occasions, stressing the quiet comfort of the view of hundreds of boats at anchor in Marina del Rey "forming the perfect setting."

Whether or not Mr. and Mrs. McCabe have visited any of the other Castagnola dining spots we can't say but surely they should as each seems to out-do the other. Lobster House dinner houses should definitely be included on every dine-outers "must" list.

If you're a popular price chaser you might find the Terrace Room of the Beverly Comstock Hotel on Wilshire Blvd. in W. L. A. an interesting spot.

They're presenting a cocktail hour over there daily when generous drinks are served from 4 'til 7 and include complimentary hors d'oeuvres thrown in and all at popular prices. It's rapidly becoming a favorite rendezvous for Southlanders.

For that hungry brunch bunch who happen to be in the neighborhood of Manhattan Beach, they've got just the thing waiting for them at the Pen and Quill Restaurant every Sunday from 10 in the ayem 'til 2 in the afternoon.

And such delicious sounding things they present, like stuffed pineapple, melons, oranges, peaches, prunes and all stuff like that there! Or graham cracker tart shells filled with pudding, fudge topping and meringue swirls... patty shells filled with ice cream and fresh strawberries, and so on.

There are nine entries from which to choose and all for the ridiculous price of \$2.95 for grown-ups and one seventy-five for the kids. It also includes beverage. So now you know where to go next Sunday, irrespective of who tells you otherwise!

Dropped into Sam Failla's San Franciscan last Friday night with the intention of just staying for a minute or two and wound up spending the rest of the evening there.

Reason? Well, that Vivian Grant on the piano and vocals is really something (although she's closed there now but it probably be back some time) so feel a mention is required.

Then her string man, Johnny Creech makes some of the greatest sounds come out of that violin of his, plus his vocals. And he's not really a violinist... he's a fiddler and one of the jazziest!

And rounding out the trio for the nite, who should appear on the scene for the nite but "Sex on the Sax", Harriet Blackman. Although she hasn't picked up that horn of hers since she last played at the San Franciscan, she hasn't lost that wonderful lip of hers. Such a performer!

In fact such a trio of performers. Would like to see this group in Sam's on a permanent basis. Bet they'd ring the cash register!

Incidentally, Sam's buttoning up the San Franciscan as

of July 1st. Oh come now! It's only for a week! Do you resent him and his crew a week off for a summer vacation? They'll be back on the 7th a full of stuff and high purpose so hang tough 'til then. And come back with money!

It'll be Las Vegas on Hawthorne Blvd. starting tonight, Wednesday, when Jim, Jo and the Unpredictables open at the Zebra Room for an undetermined length of time. And "unpredictable" they are, too! You never know what will come next. Even owner Jerry Babitch isn't entirely sure.

Jo swings out with those great vocals while Jim blows the (not one—but TWO) saxes during their performance and both equally well. That's at the same time, you know!

Meanwhile, you'll find Frank, Roger, Ottie and Helen, still in there swingin' for your enjoyment and entertainment. Oh yes, and of course Jerry'll also be on hand with his gimmicks, etc.

Y'know, most bartenders when they go behind the bar to put in a shift, remove their coats. Not so at Pucci's Wall Street West over there in the Union Bank Building.

Of course Mike Pucci does "cause he's a real bartender" but brother Len (Otherwise known as "Pooch") simply buttons his coat and goes to work!

Yet he works fast and efficiently and continues a constant line of chatter to all present. This guy even talks to glasses! And all without the slightest bead of perspiration. Real cool cat!

For a spot that doesn't boast entertainment, per se, this's one of the most entertaining cocktail lounges in the area.

It's a luncheon cocktail adventure at the Wall Street West and to the ladies, they have got something special for you daily during that cocktail time.

But Len and Mike Pucci have got to be a pair of the funniest guys around for gents who aren't supposed to be in show business. And there's no entertainment tax added to your tab, either.

If you play your cards right maybe you can get Len to go thru some of his routines for you. Funny man!

And hey, got another dance for you coming up here on Friday, June 28. It's to be a combination show and dance at the Longshoremen's Auditorium again at 231 W. "C" St., in Wilmington featuring Jose Alfredo Jimenez, and Las Hermanas Huerta. Then from Sinaloa it's La Banda Silaloense and a fine dance band.

Better make some table reservations, though and call TE 2-6940.

Here's some more solid stuff in the Gardena area. It's The Jimmy Robins Soul Revue every nite from 9 'til 2 at The Soul-Ville Club, 14048 Crenshaw in Gardena.

Then on Saturday and Sunday you can enjoy some cool

jam sessions at 7 o'clock in the morning! Yeah, kind of early but not to live entertainers like Jimmy Robins and his crew. Jimmy's quite a well-known recording artist, as you probably know.

There's something new in the way of entertainment coming into the Torrance Ramada Inn for your enjoyment. It's the electric guitar of Cliff Edwards Monday thru Thursday from 8 in the evening and then moving in for the Friday and Saturday nite stint it is The Tops Trio from 9 o'clock on for your dancing and listening pleasure. That's all we have at the present writing but will let you know more later on this new entertainment gig.

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