

Spot 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

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

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

House special before 7 p.m. 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, Ollie 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!

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 I'll 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 night, who should appear on the scene for the night 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

And hey, got another dance 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 night 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.

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 night from 9 'til 2 at The Soul-Ville Club, 14048 Crenshaw in Gardena.

Then on Saturday and Sunday you can enjoy some cool

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