

Wine Spectator

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SETTING ITS OWN PACE

My 12 favorite Los Angeles restaurants
celebrate the city's culinary diversity BY HARVEY STEIMAN

At **VALENTINO** in Santa Monica, owner-host Piero Selvaggio can match his kitchen's refined specialties with apt choices from the far corners of Italy off his Grand Award-winning wine list. The list, numbering more than 2,500 labels, overflows with insider favorites from every region on the boot, and if Selvaggio is in the house, he can reach into the cellar to find a whole meal's worth of unexpected wine hits. The list also addresses California and the rest of the world impressively. Or you can get a glass to go with a bowl of spaghetti at the casual wine bar out front.

In recent years, the kitchen at Valentino has had its ups and downs due to a succession of chefs, but it seems to have found its footing again with chef Tomasso Tarantino. After working under Luciano Pellegrino at Valentino Las Vegas until 2007, Tarantino spent six months in Sicily immersing himself in Selvaggio's native cuisine. On a recent visit, the Sicilian dishes sparkled with freshness and delicacy. Creations such as thinly sliced eggplant with olives and lemon, tuna with blood oranges, and spaghetti in red chile pepper oil with tiny onions won me over anew.



Piero Selvaggio draws on a Grand Award-winning wine cellar at Valentino.