

Highlight Restaurant

# The Silence, the deafening details of a star from Palermo at the Therasia Resort on the island of Vulcano (Aeolian Report)

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The notice already seemed rather noteworthy as soon as it was heard between 2015 and 2016, a substantial changing of the guard at the **Cappero**.

grusoni

*Therasia Resort – Vulcano. The Grusoni rest.*

The five star resort of the island of Vulcano in the Aeolian chain, the **Therasia Resort**, had engaged a young chef from Palermo about whom very little was known. I met him in February of 2015 and many things became quite clear. **Giuseppe Biuso**, born in Palermo in 1988, encountered with a glass of Chianti and two small rice balls in front of him, did not unbutton himself more than was necessary. His smile was contagious, however and, between silences and small hesitations, made it evident that he had an energy and an awareness so powerful that they could virtually be touched with one's hand. He waited an hour for my arrival without batting an eye – as always I am embarrassingly late. After stammering some excuses, I asked, a bit impatiently, what the new program at the Therasia was going to be. I knew that this was not an easy question, but it was a crucial point. The restaurant has its own visibility, had reached certain goals in its short history, and, if that was not enough, had an important Michelin star. For anyone, this was going to be an important challenge. Not for him, though, and if there was some uncertainty on his part he did not show it. His 28 years already show an important curriculum, the last stop on the coast of Romagna, but there are as well the Met of the Metropole Hotel in Venice, the Grand Hotel of Rimini, and the Golf Hotel at Puntala in Tuscany. And then the Mosaico on Ischia when Nino Di Costanzo was there, La Siriola of Casa Cialares in San Cassiano (in the Alto Adige), Vill Crespi and Boscaretti under feared chef Cannavacciuolo. The talent, already in his DNA, had grown and developed working in these prestigious spots. He told me that the program was based on Palermo and its cuisine: caponata, lumache, anelletti... I smiled, the young man was sharp or crazy as a loon.



*Il Cappero restaurant 2016 – Executive Chef  
Giuseppe Biuso*

A few months later, in high season, I am sitting at a table of the Cappero restaurant of the Therasia Resort, the one directly in front of the kitchen. The spaces are ample and comfortable, the setting is elegant, well and softly lighted, and the atmosphere is luxurious. The first row of tables benefit from a fresh breeze and seem close to a jump into the sea. Behind, two tables are virtually on top of the ovens, the kitchen, with its ample glass panels, is an open one.

But there is one thing which amazes me and absorbs me during the rest of the entire meal: **the silence**. The popping of a cork by **Angelo Prizzi**, the sommelier, the discreet whispering of the creative maître d'hotel **Salvio Di Scala**, the lapping of the waves on the rocks, all of this is louder than the sound created by the kitchen. I remain hypnotized, on my feet for twenty minutes before sitting down. It was the same calm and the same energy which I could touch with my hand during our encounter in Palermo. Every once in a while the faint ring of a bell. "tin", or the time in minutes and seconds before the dish would be ready. Respected with millimetrical precision. Eating by myself was fabulous. A glance at the chef, another at the sea while the sky changed from azure to black amidst the purple, grey, and garnet tones of an immense Aeolian sunset.

In the dishes, Sicily, with its heart in **Palermo**. Among the hors d'oeuvres – but always after an appetizer with which the chef “teases” the diner – a phantasmagoric dish of sardines known as “Sarda a beccafico”; a “diverse” caponata of eggplant, both plates entirely different from the standard ones. The flavors of the sea and the soil can be found in the “babbaluci”, snails and sea snails in Palermo style seasoned with parsley (both leaves and stems) and cooked with olive oil, garlic, and hot pepper, a dish of circular beauty. Note the photograph. Among the first courses: the thick hard wheat spaghetti seasoned with basil, Avola almonds, and sea almonds, a mollusk, in a “soup” of cherry tomatoes, an immensely satisfying dish. The plate which provoked tears, however, was “la vongola casca proprio a fagiolo”, “the clam which could not have arrived more conveniently”: anelletti (pasta rings), those utilized in timbales in Palermo, cooked as though they were for a risotto with, clams, Badda di Polizzi beans, and rosemary. Then “broccoli arriminati”, a contemporary dish redolent of history as well, durum wheat maccheroni with cauliflower, anchovies from Spain’s Cantabria region, raisins, and pine nuts. Among the second courses: “capretto aggrassato”, a fascinating parallelepiped of braised baby kid with new potatoes, a reduction of Marsala wine, Giarratana onions, and Bronte pistachios.

un'altra caponata di melanzana

*“un'altra caponata di melanzana”*

These are all dishes which leave their mark, plates which require notable technical skills, light but intense in flavor ... and entirely Sicilian, or perhaps better, from Palermo. The Sicilian character which many demanded, is now at home on the island of Vulcano, recounted, or rather whispered, by a true citizen of Palermo like Giuseppe Biuso. A cuisine full of surprises which, if I may be allowed to say it, goes beyond one Michelin star.

The task of Salvio Di Scala is almost psychoanalytic: friendly, respectful, attentive. At work between the tables he is, to say the least, magisterial. The same can be said of Andrea Prizzi, now in his second year and from Palermo as well; his job is not a simple one but it is done with the highest possible professionalism. The selection of the wines is a difficult task and is done on the basis of personal passion, the dishes on the menu, and a demanding clientele which is not easy to satisfy. And there is Elena as well, who adds a light and delightful feminine touch, warmth, a true sense of the house’s work.

To conclude: Capperio is an extraordinary restaurant, high class, a reference point for the region. One which is not to be missed. Each and every aspect is meticulously controlled and cared for, finds its place in a concept which is a single whole: cuisine, ambience, setting, dining area, cellar, service.

In order to offer an additional key of interpretation, I wished to interview **Umberto Trani**: director, heart, and historic memory of the Therasia Resort, the man who has the difficult role of total responsibility for a five star luxury hotel

**Director Trani, a new season and a new chef. How has the cuisine changed, if it has changed, at Therasia?**  
The Therasia resort has had very precise ideas about food and wine ever since 2010. Since then, year after year, it has been implemented and further developed. The persons who interpret this concept can change, but the project itself remains intact as a whole.

**Effectively speaking, there are now more restaurants. How many different offerings are available at the Therasia Resort?**

There are three restaurants, the Grusoni, where we serve a Mediterranean cuisine with fish starters and a fish counter for the main courses which we can offer thanks to local fishermen who bring us, directly and on a daily basis, the catch from the Aeolian sea. To this we have added a snack menu with salads and sandwiches. Pizza is something on its own, and we dedicate meticulous attention to it starting from the selection of the flour to use and including the mother yeast we utilize, the leavening itself, which lasts over 16 hours, and finally, the products which garnish and season it. The Arcipelago, instead, is our typical trattoria, or bistrot, which serves the classic and traditional dishes of Sicily, those with the aromas and flavors which can only be found on this island. Cappero, instead, is a gourmet restaurant which re-elaborates and re-interprets Sicilian recipes using products which are entirely local and adding a certain creativity and fantasy to the plates. This year there are some unique dishes, and the ambience which one breathes in the restaurant is equally unique. Let me say that the difference is in small details which makes this philosophy much felt. For example, last year the lunch buffet offered pastiera and caprese salad, Neapolitan dishes, while this year there are Iris and Sfince, totally Sicilian. At the Cappero there were previously the Neapolitan playing cards and now there is the famous Sicilian cart! We have returned to Sicily thanks to Giuseppe Biuso from Palermo and his staff.

**What are the objectives we you have created for yourselves and which you have requested that chef Giuseppe Biuso obtain?**

They are many and very ambitious ones as well! In support of his work we have a solid group and an ownership which, each and every year, invest important sums to improve this structure which, needless to say, is unique in the entire world. With this as a starting point, there is also a search, a meticulous one, for the right personnel to create the product and the services – we always look for the best which the market offers us. Our team is made up of total professionals; to cite a few examples, our maître d'hotel Salvio di Scala, our sommelier Andrea Prizzi, Sicilian to the core, and I could continue on and on naming the entire staff which, day after day, make us proud of the work we do. To return to the objectives, they are simple one: to offer excellence in all that we do. In the hotel we produce everything, from the salami to the bread and including even the yogurt and the desserts. Everything needs to be done with the heart and with passion. In the final analysis, there is one sole judge who can tell us at what point we are ... the client. All of our efforts must be directed towards him, because a five star hotel must be an uncommon experience. This is our objective!

**Tell us about the new chef, Giuseppe Biuso.**

I have known Giuseppe for a long time. We worked together in a hotel at Salice d'Ulzio in 2008. I recall that he was already a serious young man with much ambition. This winter, when we began to search for a new chef, I was told by a friend that Giuseppe was looking for a new challenge. Accordingly, I departed with the maître d'hotel and we travelled to Riccione on the coast of Romagna where he was working. We sat down at a table of this restaurant as though we were normal clients. After two dishes, I said to the maître "this is the man we are looking for". I now can observe him at the hotel as a serious professional who respects everyone, who is always available to others, be they in his part of the operation or a different one. This is of fundamental importance for the working environment, and thanks to this we have succeeded in creating a cohesive group, one without prima donnas, true professionals, everyone willing to help the others out. I do not know what we will achieve together, but I am ready to bet on this working group and I am convinced that Giuseppe will make an important name for himself.

**A final question which someone obviously has already posed: why did your path and that of Crescenzo Scotti, now at the Flauto di Pan of Villa Cimbrone at Ravello – diverge after the successes achieved?**

I would like to first say that this took place in a climate of deep and mutual respect. Fundamentally, each of us had the same convictions and the same desire, namely that it was time to discover and try something new. And, at the moment, the choices we made have given us both much satisfaction.

**Therasia Resort**

Vulcano - Isole Eolie

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