



## The Journal

Your favorite Food is  
likely from CALIFORNIA



# Tortello is bringing handmade pasta to Wicker Park - Chicago

February 2, 2022;

By GRACE WONG - CHICAGO TRIBUNE

After five years at Lula Cafe, it was time for Duncan Biddulph to leave. For the next seven months, he traveled through Italy, spending time in Abruzzo, Naples and Puglia, where he learned about the interdependent communities tended livestock on self-sufficient farms and learned the key tenets of Italian eating — simplicity, seasonality and celebration.

Whether it was foraging for wild chicories, dandelion greens and fennel; milking sheep for fresh ricotta; or making pasta by hand, Biddulph was moved by the way people lived day-to-day and how the flavor palate was connected with the surroundings. For giant food holidays like Christmas or New Year's Eve, he sat down with 25 Italians and passed around a dizzying abundance of food, including truffles, which every person “just ate like an apple,” he said.

“I thought it was amazing,” Biddulph said.

It's this energy, passion and wonder that Biddulph is bringing as executive chef for Tortello, an Italian, handmade pasta-focused casual restaurant in Wicker Park, which opened July 1.

“What we're trying to bring to Tortello is a community, a sort of sharing table,” Monni said. “There are a lot of families in the neighborhood and we want to open our doors to everybody and show them the simple food that Italy brings.”



DARIO & JILL

The idea of a small restaurant and shop was born out of Venetian mornings in Monni's grandmother's house, where the scent of coffee and sauce permeated the air and flour dusted the counters where she made enough fresh pasta to feed three hungry boys and the rest of her family every day. But despite growing up around shepherds, cheesemongers and butchers and working in the hospitality industry in London, Monni didn't feel the timing was right for his own venture until he met his wife, Jill Gray, who lived in Chicago.

Tortello is half restaurant and half specialty shop. The fresh handmade pastas and sauces you find in your orders can be bought by the pound to take home and there are also grab-and-go portions of lasagna and other pastas. But when you dine in, you'll be eating dishes that Biddulph and Davide Nardelli, a consultant whose grandmother was friends with Monni's grandmother, created together, referencing the two nonnas' recipe books. Tortello also brought in Lilla Simone, a handmade pasta expert from Puglia, who has shown staff how to make each shape and style. The intense commitment to technique is dying out in the States, Monni said, and he hopes Tortello will keep the tradition going.

Biddulph's favorite dish is the tortello di burrata, small dumplings filled with burrata and coated in a brown butter and sage sauce before being topped with toasted, chopped hazelnuts. He says it's the perfect representation of the simplicity and attention to detail that the shop embodies.

"It's a revelatory bite," Biddulph said, making a gesture of his brain exploding with his hands. "It's bonkers. The texture of the pasta, the burrata, it's unbelievably good and when everything comes together, it's bonkers." Monni excitedly jumped in, describing it as an "explosion of pleasure" and praised the pasta pieces for being "perfectly imperfect" and artistic.

The pasta menu is divided into three sections, one dedicated to filled pastas like tortelli, another to fine pasta, like orecchiette with rapini, breadcrumbs and chile peppers, and another to "fake" pasta, or vegetable-based creations, such as carrot "noodles" with pesto alla genovese in a parmigiano reggiano basket. You'll also find a coffee and drinks section, with imported Italian wines, traditional Italian cocktails like Negroni, and Italian sodas. And don't miss the tiramisu, the salame al cioccolato and the granita for dessert.

The restaurant is decorated with personal touches at every corner, whether it's the sky blue scooter hanging from the ceiling, the vintage scale identical to the one Monni's grandfather had in his shop in Italy, or the mural of the Italian "finger purse" gesture from a tattooed arm. Pasta-making classes will come soon, but in the meantime, peek in through the floor-to-ceiling window at the front of the shop where the pasta is made or go in and sit at the counter behind it.

"I'm having a good time cooking food that I love to cook and I'm really looking forward for people to have the opportunity to come and share this experience with us," Biddulph said. "I know how much (Monni) is looking forward to it. It will be very fun for everyone."



Fresh pasta on display in the Oscartek - Gem

Great read from <https://www.tortellopasta.com/> History;

BORN AND RAISED IN ITALY, Dario Monni has been steeped in the rich Italian food culture from an early age. In his hometown of Venice, Monni learned the art of preparing handmade pasta from his "nonna" while listening to stories of his grandfather's specialty food store. His summers were spent with relatives on his father's side in rural Sardinia, where his family worked as shepherds, cheesemongers and butchers, imparting onto him the deep-rooted value of the region's rituals, honest ingredients and dedication to an authentic craft.

These early experiences fueled Monni's passion for Italy's revered cuisine and the culture of family-focused hospitality, inspiring him to pursue a career in the food and beverage industry. After obtaining a degree from Istituto Alberghiero Giuseppe Maffiolo, one of Italy's most respected culinary institutions, Monni left Venice for London at age 18 where he further pursued work within the city's world-class mixology scene. With a keen eye for detail, he excelled behind the bar and held positions at some of the world's most famed establishments such as Harry's Bar, Gritti Palace, Cipriani and Soho's LAB.

In 2009, Monni departed London and spent the next nine years traveling the globe, helming the beverage programs of top luxury restaurants and nightclubs in Dubai, Montreal and more. In 2012, Monni returned to London and landed at acclaimed Italian restaurant L'Anima where he worked alongside celebrity chef Francesco Mazzei, initially leading the bar program of the award-winning concept and quickly advancing to oversee front of house operations. During this time, Monni met his future wife, Jill Gray, a native Chicagoan, and the two spent

several years together in London. Named one of Business Insider's "Top 30 Women in Advertising" in 2015, Gray has gathered extensive experience in marketing and advertising, leading award-winning consumer brand campaigns at agencies such as Leo Burnett and Publicis. She then moved to Facebook where she spent five years, and now heads up creative operations at VidMob.

A desire to be closer to family led Monni and Gray to relocate to her Midwestern hometown in 2016, where the couple set about starting their own family and bringing his lifelong vision to fruition. With the 2019 opening of Tortello, a charming neighborhood pasta shop & chef-driven restaurant, the husband and wife team is transporting Italy's emphasis on simplicity through culinary and cultural traditions to Chicago. As the restaurant's co-owners, Monni and Gray are committed to continuing his family's legacy of the simplest and very best ingredients, artisanal hand craftsmanship, and Italian hospitality & ritual.

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## Your Favorite Fast Food Is Probably From California

By Soumya Karlamangla

February 1, 2022; GLENDALE, Calif. — In a quiet corner of the Glendale Galleria shopping mall, between a video game store and a pizza place, a red sign glows "Panda Express."



Here, according to my research, is the first ever Panda Express location, which opened in 1983. But neither outside the store nor inside, with its typical cafeteria-style counter and steel bins of hot food, are there any signs indicating as much.

So as I paid for my chow mein and egg rolls there on a recent afternoon, I asked the cashier if we were in fact inside the original location of Panda Express.

“That’s what they say,” she said, clearly disinterested in my line of questioning.

This, for better or worse, sums up the state of California’s culinary history. The Golden State deserves credit for dozens of fast-food chains and dining trends that have taken off across the United States, but much of that legacy has been forgotten.

Yes, the nation’s very first fast-food hamburger chain, White Castle, got its start in Kansas. But California has since given rise to a disproportionate share of America’s most popular fast-food restaurants: McDonald’s, Taco Bell, Carl’s Jr, Jack in the Box, Del Taco and, of course, Panda Express. The most common explanation is car culture: fast food was a response to highways and an increasingly on-the-go lifestyle, which California perfected.

But the pattern extends beyond quick-service restaurants, suggesting California has a special kind of sway over the rest of the country. Many large chains that aren’t considered fast food also hail from California, including Marie Callender’s, the Cheesecake Factory, Denny’s and the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

“Everyone looks at California for trendsetting in a lot of ways,” George Geary, a chef and food writer in Southern California, told me. “If it makes it here, it’ll make it anywhere.”

In 2021, Geary published “Made in California,” which compiles the history of 50 of the oldest California-born food establishments. The inspiration for the book came when Geary was driving on a highway in Indiana and spotted a sign listing restaurants at the next exit. Of the 24 named, 22 had begun in California.

“I was like, ‘Wow. Do these people realize all the California stuff that comes here?’” Geary said. Even if a restaurant isn’t from California, the foods it is serving might be.

A&W Restaurants, which started in Lodi in 1919, invented a concoction called root beer. The Brown Derby, a now-defunct Los Angeles chain, created the Cobb salad, according to Geary’s book. Baskin-Robbins, now the world’s largest chain of ice cream shops, first opened in Pasadena and pioneered the ice cream cake.

But many of these histories have been lost to time. The companies usually don’t have historians, and the original buildings have often been razed or remodeled, and their pasts discarded.

“When you go to Europe, you see plaques on buildings, and you read them and learn what happened there,” Geary said. “Here, we don’t know what happens anywhere.”

On the same day that I visited the Panda Express in Glendale, I drove to the site of the first IHOP, which opened in Burbank in 1958 and has since expanded to more than 1,500 locations worldwide. I knew that the building that once housed the original restaurant was no longer an IHOP, but I assumed it would still be easy to spot. Instead, I walked in circles until I realized a Mendocino Farms I had passed repeatedly was in the former IHOP building.

Of the 50 chains in Geary’s book, only 15 are still operating in their original locations. Some have been turned into medical buildings, animal groomers, post offices, hair salons or banks.

And in classic California fashion, the first homes of several of our most well-known restaurants have been torn down and transformed into parking lots and freeways.

More California news;

**Ski access:** Many luxury ski resorts have been consolidated under conglomerates, which has in some ways increased access. But the crowds have left some skiers feeling wistful.

**Immigration:** For the first time, immigration is making up a majority of population growth in the United States.

**Woodside housing:** California’s attorney general ruled that it would be illegal for a Silicon Valley town to declare itself a mountain lion sanctuary to avoid building affordable housing, The Associated Press reports.

Today’s travel tip comes from Kevin Danaher, who recommends the town of Quincy, about 200 miles north of Sacramento:

“Quincy is the county seat of Plumas County, home of the mighty Feather River, the largest watershed in the Sierras. Plumas County is larger than Yosemite and Yellowstone, with more mammal species, more plant species, and more nesting bird species than those two famous places. Quincy has several good restaurants, old growth trees at Gansner Park near Spanish Creek, and is near the Lakes District with an abundance of lakes and hiking trails.”

Tell us about your favorite places to visit in California. Email your suggestions to [CAtoday@nytimes.com](mailto:CAtoday@nytimes.com). We’ll be sharing more in upcoming editions of the newsletter.

As developers in Southern California expand into their habitats, the birds are forced to find new places to live nearby. And sometimes there isn’t anywhere to go, further endangering an already at-risk species.

Southern Cal scientists recently ran an experiment to see if they could successfully transplant burrowing owls to new habitats when developers build over their homes. And it worked.



512 South Airport Blvd., South San Francisco, CA 94080

Tel: 855.885.2400 | 650.342.2400 | Fax: 650.342.7400 | [www.oscartek.com](http://www.oscartek.com)