

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Marella Caracciolo Chia, 'Sleeping Beauty', *The New York Times*, April 24, 2014

One of the oldest restaurants in the world, Turin's fabled but faded *del cambio*, has been revived and returned to its former glory, only this time with great food.

While *del cambio*, which opened in 1757, was once a go-to spot for titans and kings, it was always better known for its clientele than its cuisine. As its name -- meaning "the exchange" -- suggests, the restaurant in Turin, Italy, held sway among the city's upper class and the occasional star passing through. Mozart, Nietzsche, Maria Callas and Audrey Hepburn have been among its two and a half centuries of boldface patrons, and members of Turin's Agnelli dynasty have been regulars for generations. Though Napoleon's regime briefly Frenchified its name as *Café du Change*, the original Italian had been reinstated by the time it became the unofficial dining room of the country's first parliament. But the fortunes of the restaurant were tethered to the city's: Turin's once-thriving industry tumbled in the 1980s and '90s, regaining some momentum when the city hosted the Olympics in 2006. The costs, however, left the economy limping. By 2012, the luster of *Del Cambio* had long faded and it was on the brink of bankruptcy, which is when the investor and Turin native Michele Denegri stepped in to buy it.

"When I was growing up in the '70s, this was a city for old people. And so was *Del Cambio*, with its horrible food and its staid interiors," he says. Today the city is having a renaissance -- it's home to the original *Eataly*, and it's the capital of the increasingly influential Slow Food movement. Signifying true boom times, Turin-based Fiat gained full control of Chrysler this year and recently announced plans to increase the plant's annual production. Denegri wanted a restaurant worthy of his newly thriving city. Using Jack Clayton's "*The Great Gatsby*" and Sofia Coppola's "*Marie Antoinette*" as visual references, he enlisted the help of art dealer Franco Noero and interior decorator Marco Segantin to revamp the place.

A team of 100 restorers, carpenters and upholsterers rehabilitated the main salon's 19th-century frescoes and regilded the boiserie. To inject modernity into the Old World space, Denegri commissioned the Israeli artist Izhar Patkin to graffitiate 200 Sèvres platters. Through a grand passageway is a second dining room, paneled in artwork by Michelangelo Pistoletto.

The London-based Italian designer Martino Gamper created round tables with modernist wood inlays and plush red velvet chairs. Up a new marble staircase lies *Bar Cavour* -- named for the leader of the *Risorgimento*, another *Del Cambio* regular -- a vaulted room decorated in a calligraphed mural by Venezuelan artist Arturo Herrera.

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Despite the expense lavished on the interiors, Denegri intends to instill a sense of democracy in Del Cambio. His family would likely not have been regulars in the old days -- he proudly notes that his grandfather drove a taxi in the city. While Denegri cites as inspiration exclusive spots like Wiltons in London and the Plaza Hotel in New York (before its 1999 renovation, he notes), he is quick to point out that the spirit here is not classist, and his staff will make everyone feel at ease.

Part of transforming Del Cambio from a symbol of the city's haute bourgeoisie into a true destination is the appointment of a great chef. Matteo Baronetto, 36, who had worked for nearly two decades under Milan-based chef Carlo Cracco -- of "I Am Love" fame -- agreed to come if Denegri would give him a custom French kitchen. Three days later he was in Turin.

The kitchen includes a dining area where guests can watch 14 cooks in action. Baronetto's menu features hazelnut consommé with steamed shrimp in an elderflower sauce, and an award-winning crème brûlée made with extra-virgin olive oil, vanilla pods and squid. His signature dish, though, is a lighter version of traditional la Finanziera (veal sweetbreads). Baronetto echoes Denegri when he explains Del Cambio's real draw: "the idea of returning to my own Piedmontese roots."

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