

A Long-Time Local Bistro and
Three Up-and-Coming Restaurants
Feeling Right at Home in

Laguna Niguel

By Matt Beardmore



Bistro K

30100 Town Center Drive
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
Main: 949-495-9101
Catering/Events: 949-813-1425
www.Gobistrok.com

It is definitely a family affair at Bistro K, where owner Katia Bagatta has been involved in the restaurant business practically her entire life. Her father Tony, who turned 92 on June 12, was born near Milan, and worked his way up from busboy at his older brothers' restaurants to owning 18 different restaurants in South Africa and the U.S., serving as head chef on "Christina O," Aristotle Onassis' yacht, and achieving more accomplishments in the restaurant business than can be listed here.

While in South Africa, Tony met his future wife, Massi, who immigrated separately from Italy, and Katia was born. Since the family moved to the United States in 1980, Tony has owned several restaurants in California, including Tony's Bakery and Café from 2000-2007. "A store next door went out of business, and my dad said, 'If you want to take over, now is the time,'" said Katia Bagatta, who was working in sales at the time. "So I took over in 2007, we doubled our square footage and built Bistro K."

These days, Tony and Massi, an excellent cook in her own right, still come to the restaurant (Massi not as often as Tony), but their presence is always felt as most of the recipes are from their home in Northern Italy. "People come from Huntington Beach for our pork chops," Katia Bagatta said. There are also some Brazilian dishes on the menu – the moqueca (fresh seafood, coconut milk stew, red peppers, and cilantro) is a favorite – since there was a Brazilian chef at Bistro K for 10 years.

Other menu highlights include the coconut cake and the crème brûlée French toast, which Katia Bagatta describes as "legendary."

Bistro K is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and seats 70 inside and another 50 outside. There is live music on Fridays and Saturdays, and the bistro hosts events, such as anniversaries, weddings, private parties, and casino nights.

Bistro K also has a booming catering business, doing both corporate and private events, from intimate parties of 12 to large gatherings of up to 1,000 attendees.

No matter the size of the party, Katia Bagatta feels a sense of family around her customers. During Covid, the community rallied around Bistro K with a number of customers purchasing restaurant gift cards ranging from \$1,000 to one man who gave \$18,000.

"It's nice to have that longevity," Katia Bagatta said. "We've been in the area so long – some of my friends remember my dad from when I went to Catholic school (grades 1-8) in the area."

The Laguna Niguel Chamber of Commerce recently met with the owners of four local establishments to discuss their experience in Laguna Niguel, their customers, their menus, their plans for the future, and the importance of family.





Brooklyn City Pizza and Market
30012 Crown Valley Parkway
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
949-363-7777
www.brooklyncitymarket.com

Brooklyn born and raised, Gus Floris could not find pizza that reminded him of home when he and his wife, Margie, and their children, Alex and Kirk, moved to Laguna Niguel nine years ago from the East Coast. So with a background in the restaurant business, Gus just “started playing around making pizzas.”

Fast forward several years, and when the opportunity presented itself for the family to purchase a pizzeria, they moved fast. They closed on the location in the morning of April 1, 2022, and by noon that same day, the gas deck was up and running and Brooklyn City Pizza and Market was open for business. The Floris family slowly transitioned from the previous pizzeria’s customer base and moved over to their menu and suppliers. Gus Floris has developed nearly all of the menu items with input from his family, an exception being the cheesecake. Credit for that recipe goes to Gus Floris’ uncle, who was a baker in New York diners. “We can’t keep the cheesecake on the shelf,” Gus Floris said.

The pepperoni, classic cheese pie, and white pie are the three most popular pizzas, and there is also great demand for the

rest of the menu items, including the garlic knots, strombolini, and the margherita pizza. While being busy would seem to be a good problem for a restaurant to have, Brooklyn City Pizza and Market struggles to keep up with the order volume.

“We have a lot of capacity problems,” Gus Floris said. “Right now we have a gas deck oven with two decks, but we can only make X amount of pizzas with this. We’re looking at bringing in a new oven.”

Most of the business is takeout as there are only four tables inside the pizzeria, so the owners have discussed expanding the location as “people are dying to come in and eat,” Gus Floris said. For now, though, the family is not ready to increase the pizzeria’s footprint.

The market makes up a small portion of the business, but it includes a wide selection of pastas, hot sauces, olives, anchovies, and other imported products from Italy. “This adds to the brand if you will,” Gus Floris said.

As does the Brooklyn City Pizzeria and Market merchandise (hats, hoodies, etc.) for sale and the New York graffiti mural adorning one of the pizzeria’s walls.

“We thought we were going to do well this first year, but it’s been really blockbuster,” Gus Floris said. “It feels like every month it just keeps getting busier. It’s been a blessing to be honest.”

OC Local Taproom
30100 Town Center Drive
Laguna Niguel, CA 91677
949-310-7805
www.oclocaltaproom.com

OC Local Taproom owner and founder Patrick Thomas wanted to own a restaurant or bar since before he moved from Florida to California in 1995. That all came to fruition for Thomas with the 2022 opening of OC Local Taproom.

“It’s been good, we’ve been busy,” Thomas said during OC Local Taproom’s 1-year anniversary celebration in June. “We’re definitely meeting expectations.”

Guests can sample 62 beers on tap, and “those constantly change,” Thomas said. “There are only a few staples that don’t change.”

He is quick to point out that all the beers are independent: “Nothing is brewed by big companies – it’s all local,” said Thomas, who leverages 20 years’ experience in restaurant operations. “We feel local beer is better. We want to support the independents and we don’t want to help giant companies.”

OC Local Taproom also offers a selection of California wines and distilled spirits.



The kitchen at OC Local Taproom is leased to Tres Compas Mexican Grill. One of Thomas’ favorites is the Monster Nachos, which are served on a giant tray and serve 8-10 people. Other menu highlights include the grilled chicken wings, 3 street taco plate, short rib tacos, and the carnitas. There are food specials every week, and OC Local Taproom also recently launched Sunday brunch.

OC Local Taproom guests have plenty of entertainment options as there are 16, 70-inch flat screens that carry all the sports packages, and a 2,800-square-foot outdoor space (some of which is covered) that houses table games such as UNO, Jenga and cornhole. “It’s family friendly without the video games,” Thomas said.

Bottega Angelina
32441 Golden Lantern
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
949-542-8220
www.bottegaangelina.com

Since Bottega Angelina opened in November 2021, co-owners Sho and Filippo Fusco have been pleased at how much support they have received from the area. That kind of support should not come as much of a surprise given the incredible transformation of the space and the quality food and experience the restaurant delivers.

The Fusco’s, owners of Angelina’s Pizzeria Napoletana in Irvine, CA, and the soon-to-be opened Teatro Angelina in Costa Mesa, CA, made a significant investment in transforming Bottega Angelina when they acquired the 10,000-square-foot property, partnering with Los Angeles-based Kelly Architects to maximize the space’s potential.



“The restaurant prior to being Bottega was an old steakhouse,” Sho Fusco said. “The steakhouse had not taken advantage of the view – we really opened it up now. It’s light and bright now.”

In addition to the ocean views from the restaurant’s four patios, guests of Bottega Angelina are treated to more amazing views inside the 350-seat restaurant with its “modern and sophisticated state of the art décor.”

Bottega Angelina’s owners are also focused on importing as many ingredients as possible (even though they know that will cause prices to fluctuate) and being highly involved in the menu selection as they work with a number of Italian chefs to ensure they are serving authentic Italian cuisine.

Some of the more popular menu items are the focaccia, truffle fries, the pizza, which Sho Fusco called “phenomenal,” and the lasagna, which they have spent a lot of time perfecting.

Within Bottega Angelina is an Italian mercato that covers nearly 2,000 square feet. The space includes a cured meats and cheeses counter, a coffee station, pastry counter, and a mercato where guests can purchase wine, fresh pasta, chocolate, and many other food and pantry items and beverages.

Bottega Angelina has created a 27 Club on weekends that Sho Fusco considers a “huge success” as guests are allowed to try a variety of marketplace items. For \$27 – the number of seats reserved at the bar for this event – guests try five tastings of wine with three pairings of food.

There have also been discussions about organizing a weekend farmer’s market at Bottega Angelina, but plans have not been finalized.