



# Perfect tribute to old Franco magic

EVERYONE knows La Margherita in Southampton, don't they?

It's been an icon in the city for almost 40 years, first in Commercial Road and more lately at Town Quay.

Superb food, lively welcoming atmosphere, genial host. Who doesn't know Nikos?

But even with all that well-deserved reputation, time doesn't stand still even for a venue such as La Margherita.

Which is why owner Nikos Raftopoulos has completely reinvented his restaurant once again.

"We wanted to do something even though these are difficult times," Nikos said, shortly after his dramatic new-look restaurant was revealed to customers.

"I felt we needed to say to people that La Margherita is here and still offering the best Italian food."

In fact, although the restaurant has changed its look substantially, its menu is a step backwards to an age that Nikos feels takes diners back to a time when good Italian food was simply cooked, well presented, and yes, a real delight.

"I have looked and looked again at all my old menus and those of Franco – many of them handwritten – and decided which dishes to bring back," he explained.

His reference to Franco, of course, is deliberate. Franco Fantini, the much-loved and much-missed founder of La Margherita, passed away two years ago.

In many ways the changes to La Margherita are a living tribute to Franco from Nikos, and not just the food. The decor and renovations,

superbly modern and striking in many ways, are topped off by the subtle addition of Franco's famous signature on the entrance doors themselves.

The menu includes some old favourites that many of La Margherita's loyal clientele will recall from times old and not so: Pizza Sophia Loren, Pizza Al Capone, Boat Show Pasta with its marvellous calamari, mussels and prawns, Tagliatelle Salmon, and the gorgeous Spaghetti da Moglia with chicken strips and sun-dried tomatoes.

The La Margherita classics are there – Saltimbocca alla Romana with its pan-fried veal flambéed in Marsala wine. Coscioto D'Agnelo Brasato – succulent lamb shank with garlic mash.

The decor is crisper and brighter than before, the views of the harbour are exaggerated and a window seat is one of the best places to wine and dine someone special.

The bar area has been completely transformed, not so much a nightclub, more a modern Mediterranean-style venue. And the conservatory has been covered to create a beautiful new setting.

Is it all that Nikos wanted? It certainly seemed that way when at a recent informal gathering to launch the changes he was as always the genial and generous host.

Certainly guests tucking into the marvellous food emerging on heaped platefuls from the kitchen had nothing but praise – raved in fact – for the dishes.

□ La Margherita: 023 8033 3390.



Nikos



Chef David White, front and his fellow contestants.

## Contest to cook up a top chef

THE heat was on in the Southampton City College kitchen as catering students went head to head in an *Apprentice*-style contest to find a top chef of the future.

David White is now working for the south's largest independent caterer Wise Catering at the Wimbledon Championships after impressing judges with his herb-crusted lamb dish with accompaniments.

All finalists were offered lunch at the PSP Southampton Boat Show by Wise Catering managing director Chris Treacher, who was a judge at the contest along with City College head chef Alan Stubbington, CEO Lindsey Noble and the *Daily Echo*'s Lorelei Reddin.

## Sign up for mince meal challenge

BUDDING young chefs from across Hampshire are being invited to enter a prestigious cooking competition.

Children aged 11 to 16 can plate up their recipes, in a bid to win the Red Tractor beef and lamb "Mmmake it with Mince Challenge".

The free to enter competition, which is now in its fifth year, welcomes children to design and submit their own dishes, using Red Tractor beef or lamb mince.

All recipes must be cooked from scratch and can be a completely new idea or a twist on an existing meal.

All entries must be received by October 21, with regional cook-offs being held throughout November, where celebrity chef James Martin will be among the judging panel.

Winners of the regional heats will receive an iTouch, £200 worth of school kitchen equipment and a place in the national final.

For more information or to enter the challenge, visit [simplybeefandlamb.co.uk/mincechallenge](http://simplybeefandlamb.co.uk/mincechallenge).