



THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE

Federico Marchetti

The founder and chief executive of Yoox Group set up fashion website Yoox.com in 2000. The company now manages 23 luxury-brand online stores and is valued at over €500m.

The most Italian thing about me is the way I approach meals, both in terms of how I think about them, and what I like to eat. For example, I limit my business meals to lunch. Dinners are personal and business breakfasts are just not a part of Italian culture; it's a more Anglo-Saxon approach. Italians like to take their time over a meal and warm up to the person they are dining with. I have a business lunch two or three times a week, and it's almost always Italian or Japanese, and almost always at a friendly, understated place off the beaten track.

This isn't really a conscious thing, but I think the places I choose reflect my personality, just as my business does. They are all little places, not too flashy, where quality matters, and that create a sense of discovery; you need insider knowledge to find them. I generally feel you get better service in a place that isn't obsessed with celebrity, where you can concentrate on your conversation, as opposed to your guest or waiter always looking over your shoulder to see what famous person may have arrived. Service is incredibly important, because if it's bad that's all you think about.

So these are the sort of places I seek out wherever I am in the world – I travel for business about every two weeks – and once I find them, I keep going back. For example, it's Italian taverna Locanda Verde or Omen, a traditional noodle bar, in New York. And in Tokyo recently I went to my two regular places: Borracho, which is like Japanese Mama cuisine, and the sushi bar at the Okura hotel. I was introduced to the first by a fashion-designer friend and they make the best spaghetti with pomodoro sauce in the world; it's just like my mother's. The second is just a very small, traditional place; I think it seats 20 people at the most.

Pizza is probably my favourite food in all the world and in Milan, I always go to a completely unfashionable place called Rita e Antonio (pictured) that looks like a cross between a New York diner and Italy in the 1970s. It is run by an absolute dictator: you walk in, order immediately, and the food arrives seven or eight minutes later. It's a very good restaurant for making a long story short; I often take my board of directors there.

For longer meals, though, I invite guests to my home town, Ravenna. I just did this with a partner I am working with in China. Ravenna is famous for its mosaics, and in winter we'll go to



a very old place called Ca' De Ven, which means "home of wine", or Al Gallo, an eccentric trattoria that serves hearty Italian food. In summer, I'll take people to a floating restaurant called Jumet, which serves only fish: you pick the one you want before they cook it. This place is so secret it doesn't have a landline, just a mobile-phone number that you need to know.

My preferred place in Paris is called Derrière, hidden in the backyard of a house; you ring the doorbell and they take you through. It bills itself as a "home away from home", and since lunches are generally to thank someone after we have worked together, the atmosphere works

well. It might be strange if I were eating with someone I didn't know, but I don't do blind lunches. If I'm meeting someone for the first time, I'll do it in an office.

The only exception to that rule is when I was just starting Yoox and wanted to get Renzo Rosso to let me sell Diesel. It was February, and we were launching in June, and he invited me to lunch at his farm, to talk to all the top executives. I'd never met any of them before, but it was a good thing we weren't in his conference room because I didn't have anything to show – no PowerPoint presentation! But over a meal it was fine because it wasn't about the deal; it was about a dream, and what we could imagine. VANESSA FRIEDMAN

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