

A Little Taste of Italy

Long Island has discovered panini – those crunchy pressed Italian sandwiches – and lunch will never be the same. Lucky for new panini converts like me, Giuseppe and Marisa Ruta, originally from Ispica, Sicily, have decided to create a little panini empire here in Nassau County. **LA BOTTEGA** is located in Garden City South, La Bottega Wine Bar is in Carle Place and the third La Bottega is expected to open soon in Roslyn.

The places are small and friendly with a very active take-out business.

Walking into the Garden City South La Bottega is like visiting Italy. Tempting dishes pack the front glass display area – frittatas (omelets) with mushrooms or potatoes or cauliflower, Ruta's Sicilian lasagna, fresh marinated asparagus, to name a few. The Carle Place spot adjoins Cardinali Bakery, known throughout the metropolitan area for its great bread. In fact, all of the bread — kripina, ciabatta, whole wheat or rustic — used in the panini in both restaurants is baked in Cardinali's brick ovens, exclusively for Ruta.

Panini is the centerpiece of the restaurants. Ruta says that when he first opened La Bottega, he expected pasta to be the big seller. "But I found that I wasn't selling pasta while panini were walking out the door," he says. "People in the neighborhood understand panini. They travel; they had been to Italy and knew what it was and they wanted it. They were coming in and saying, 'You should do this and you should do that,' and it was mostly about panini. Fortunately I always listen to what people say."

There are over 30 panini on the menu such as mozzarella, tomato, basil, olive oil and balsamic vinegar; grilled chicken, oven roasted tomatoes, asiago cheese and baby arugola; pork sausage, broccoli rabe and black olive paste. And if you want something different, just select from the ingredients on the menu and they will make it for you.

Nassau



La Bottega Italian Gourmet
147 Nassau Blvd.
Garden City South
516-486-0935

465 Westbury Ave.
Carle Place
516-408-3190

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