

## The heart of Italy

By Katie Robinson  
The Progress  
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Jul 04 2006

Mario Pagan is Italian. His accent is Italian. His love is Italian. His cooking is Italian. And after nearly 35 years of preparing such cuisine for Vancouver folk, and Maple Ridge folk, he's now cooking for Chilliwack folk too.

In May 2006, Pagan opened his third restaurant: Mario's Corsaro Pasta Bar.

"I've always been a good cook," he said. "I'm Italian, I think it would come naturally."

But before opening this new restaurant, Pagan never did the cooking in his previous two restaurants. He prepared the menus, and he created the recipes, but he never did the cooking. "I used to run the dining room," he said, admitting that he thrived on seeing his customers eyes widen, and faces light up with each bite of his recipe concoctions. He loved the personal touch of chatting with, and laughing with his customers, sometimes even having a seat next to them for a minute or two. And he loved remembering the faces as they returned for a second, third, fourth, even a fifth time.

He loved his regulars.

But after an accident left him without a leg, the now 70-year-old decided it was high time to mould his own meatballs, mix his own ingredients, boil his own pasta, chop the tomatoes, and add the garlic to his own mouth-watering pasta and salad sauces.

"I was doing all the recipes, and all the menus, but I wasn't cooking – now I'm cooking," he said. "My mother Mia was a very good cook. She was cooking long before I ever got into the business ... I'm following what she did."

Pagan entered the restaurant business in 1979 after the fishing industry took a bit of a dive. He and a friend opened a small venue on Commercial Drive, and kept it going for 25 years. And at the time, Pagan's partner was involved in doing an Italian T.V. show for kids with his character being Corsaro: The Italian version of Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves.

Thus the restaurant's name, Corsaro – meaning buccaneer in Italian – was pegged.

"And it just stayed with us ever since," Pagan said.

The pasta bar has pasta. It has rigatoni, lasagna, spaghetti.

It has sauces. It has a spicy, it has tangy, it has Sicilian.

And it has garlic, garlic, and more garlic.

"I love garlic," Pagan said. "It's my favourite ingredient."



**Mario and Marie Pagan have recently opened Mario's Corsaro Pasta Bar. JENNA HAUCK/ PROGRESS**

Mario's Corsaro Pasta Bar is in the Victorian Court on the corner of Yale and Hodgins at 104-45863 Yale Road. For more information call 604-792-2221