

## **NIKO ROMITO: biography**

Niko Romito was born in Castel di Sangro (AQ) on April 30, 1974, the youngest in a family already "ruled" by three sisters. The family was close, with deep roots in the territory of Abruzzo. As a boy he enjoyed popping wheelies on his BMX bike, and as a teen he was a ski instructor and tennis coach, almost making it to the pros. He attended high school and university in Rome with dreams of banking, double-breasted suits and spools of stock market ticker tape. The powerful bond that tied him to his family and his Abruzzo called him frequently back to Rivisondoli, where his father had opened a pastry shop in 1970, converted thirty years later into a restaurant – the original "Reale".

He still had five exams to take to complete his degree in Economics and Commerce when his father fell ill. When he passed, Niko and his sister Cristiana took over the operation of Reale with the intention of keeping it going until they could find a buyer, but they quickly fell in love with the restaurant trade, and from that moment they committed to a path of hard work and research, without any safety net. Indeed, since Niko had no concrete culinary experience, his initial efforts at Reale were driven largely by improvisation and survival instinct.

When he figured out that he needed to acquire solid technical and theoretical foundations, he maintained his non-conformist attitude and decided that, rather than going for a hospitality diploma or doing an apprenticeship with a famous chef, he would teach himself and get guidance where he could find it. His responsibilities at Reale made any other solution implausible, but it was also his character that pushed him in this direction.

In Rome, he skipped the foundation requirements and took the advanced course at the the "A Tavola con lo Chef" culinary school with Antonio Sciullo, fellow Abruzzo native and friend of his father. In Sottomarina di Chioggia (VE), he took a series of courses at the Istituto Etoile. He spent twenty days in Girona at El Cellar de Can

Roca (two Michelin stars at the time, now three), not enough to absorb all the techniques and protocols, but sufficient to realize he needed to change direction. His encounter with Valeria Piccini and her husband Maurizio Menichetti at Da Caino (two Michelin stars) in Montemerano (GR) would be fateful: the personal and professional relationship that was born there continues to this day. Romito was incurably curious. Every free moment was spent in the pages of a book or at the table of one colleague or another. Taken together, all these experiences gave form to an intuition, a new vision.

2004 was the year of the "first revolution" at Reale: Niko and Cristiana cut back the seating capacity and changed to a lighter decor; the menu abandoned the concept of the mountain inn to embrace a more personal and refined expression, though still maintaining a strong connection to the territory. Recognition began to arrive: in 2005 Romito was included in the JRE Guide (Young European Restaurateurs); in 2006 he was among the best emerging chefs in the Gambero Rosso Guide and was named Young Chef of the Year by the Espresso Guide. In 2007 he was given his first Michelin star.

2008 was the year of the "second revolution". The restaurant underwent a significant restructuring and the gastronomic philosophy began leaning increasingly toward a "cuisine of the ingredient", streamlined and coherent. Between 2009 and 2011 he received his second Michelin star; three forks from Gambero Rosso; inclusion in the Le Soste Guide. He also won the Lunch of the Year award from the Espresso Guide and was named Chef of the Year by Identità Golose.

At this point, the bar had been raised to the point where the only choice was to make a complete break and expand. Romito moved the operation to Casadonna, a former monastery built in 1512 overlooking the valley of Castel di Sangro. When he bought it, it was little more than a ruin, and the intention was to turn it into the general headquarters of an entire system which, in addition to fine dining, would also include lodging and advanced professional training. It was a gamble, if only because the scale of the

renovation was enormous. In 2011 the new Casadonna opened its doors, with an upgraded version of Reale, the newly created School of Professional Training and Specialization “Accademia Niko Romito”, and a boutique hotel with six rooms. But Casadonna was conceived first and foremost as a permanent laboratory.

The following two-year period saw the consolidation of Romito’s research and culinary identity, which had grown increasingly more profound and original, and had expanded beyond territorial boundaries.

Spazio was born in 2013, in the spaces of the original Reale in Rivisondoli, the first restaurant-laboratory in Italy completely run by the students of a private culinary school. In the autumn of that year was the debut of Unforketable, the video-encyclopedia of modern Italian cuisine, in collaboration with Pasta Garofalo. Romito got his third Michelin star in November, only seven years after the first and, remarkably, at the age of thirty-nine. In 2014 Spazio opened a summer pop-up on the island of Salina in the Capofaro Malvasia & Resort, as well as a second permanent location in Rome on the third floor of Eataly. That same year, Espresso magazine assigned Romito the award for Performance of the Year with a score of 19.5 out of 20. In 2015 a third location of Spazio was inaugurated in Milan, on the fourth floor of the “Mercato del Duomo”, overlooking Galleria Vittorio Emanuele and Piazza del Duomo.

In 2016 he unveiled the project “IN-Intelligenza Nutrizionale” (Nutritional Intelligence), a groundbreaking, scientific food protocol designed for hospital catering, in partnership with Gruppo Giomi and the Università La Sapienza of Rome.

In 2017 Reale restaurant was awarded the 43rd place on The 50 World’s 50 Best Restaurants list and the first place in Gambero Rosso Guide to Italian restaurants 2018 (96/100 rating)

In the same year he began the collaboration with Bulgari Hotels & Resorts to curate the cuisine of the restaurants of the new hotels worldwide. For Bulgari Hotels & Resorts, Romito has especially designed a new concept which is the result of two years of

research and study; an anthology of great Italian classics that embodies the essence of fine Italian food. The first opening has been in Beijing, followed by Dubai, Shanghai (new properties) and Milano, where “Il Ristorante Niko Romito” debuted in August 2018.

In 2017 he signed a partnership with Italia Cibus Spa to develop and expand internationally the format “Spazio Niko Romito”. The total investment amounts to 20 million euros and foresees 8 new restaurants in 5 years.

The first opening has been in Rome at the beginning of January 2018, in the Parioli district. Spazio opens with a new formula: beside the restaurant the new Spazio Pane e Caffè offers a modern concept of “cafeteria”, with a menu designed following the *fil rouge* of bread. Spazio Niko Romito in Rome is also the first selling location of PANE, the new project of Chef Romito that conveys research and development on sourdoughs, large scale production of bread and a special food offer focused on bread.

In 2018 Reale restaurant climbed 7 positions amongst the World’s 50 Best Restaurants reaching position no. 36.

August sees the debut of ALT, the latest project signed by Accademia Niko Romito professional cooking school: a friendly and easy going format that from breakfast to dinner offers high quality food in a very informal and cozy place. Grill, bread and baked products made fresh everyday at PANE, the bread laboratory which rises behind the restaurant, and the fried chicken, signature dish of ALT.

In September Il Ristorante Niko Romito at Bulgari Hotel Shanghai has been awarded its first Michelin star.

In June 2019 Reale restaurant is ranked no. 51 amongst the World’s 50 Best Restaurants list 51-120.

And yet, while these achievements have secured his place at the apex of Italian and international cooking, they will never supplant his desire to “continue doing research and improve even more”.

## **Restaurant Reale distinctions**

3 Michelin stars

51<sup>st</sup> position on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list 2019

36<sup>th</sup> position on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list 2018

5 Hats Espresso Guide 2018, 2019, 2020 and Special Prize Riso Buono "Riso dell'Anno" to "Rice, potatoes and black pepper"

Mauviel 1830 Prize for Best Dining Room Director 2019 by

Grandes Tables du Monde to Cristiana Romito

3 forks and 96/100 points Gambero Rosso Guide 2018 and 2019

Best Italian score (Michelin/Espresso/Gambero Rosso

Guides) 5 Hats and "Dish of the year" 2017 (Espresso Guide)

43<sup>rd</sup> position on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list 2017

19,5 points and Performance of the Year 2015 (Espresso

Guide) 2012 Chef of the Year (Identità Golose)

2011 Lunch of the Year (Espresso Guide)

## **Niko Romito's books**

"Semplicità reale" (with Clara and Gigi Padovani. 2009, Giunti editore) "10 Lezioni di Cucina" (with Laura Lazzaroni. 2015 and 2017, Giunti editore)

"Apparentemente semplice" (with Leopoldo Gasbarro. 2015, Giunti editore)

"Unforketable.it" (with Elisia Menduni. 2015 Giunti editore)