

Caffe Florian Final

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SPEAKERS

Stefanos, Chris Deferio



Chris Deferio 03:15

Okay, so I don't know about you but when I first started learning about coffee, one of the first things that I learned about was the history of coffee you read The story of how it was discovered how it was spread throughout the world and the emergence of coffee bars and the important role they played in society. And one of the places you learn about when you read about the history of coffee is cafe Florian, founded in 1720. This year, they celebrate 300 years of continuous operation as a coffee bar. That's incredible. Because, yeah, I mean, you'd scratch your head for a little bit to think of a coffee bar that's been around for even 20 years. And we're talking about the actual coffee bar, not the brand, necessarily, but there are very few that have been around for even a quarter century, let alone three centuries. So there's a ton of history in this coffee bar. It has stood the test of time cafe Florian has served as an epicenter for culture and social life and political life in Venice. For all of those years, the cafe floriana experience is unlike any other way. One out there, the art on the walls and the traditions that they keep up in their service makes you feel as though you're just living through history. You can feel the history and the significance of this space all around you with all the details that they look after and their service, the way they organize their staff, the way they take care of the building, the way they curate the art, the events that they hold. It's all about creating an experience for you. And obviously 300 years of honing their craft at serving coffee is going to give them quite an edge in service and the service experience. Now today we get to talk with the longest tenured employee there. That is the art director for cafe Florian Stefanos, the pit of itch. Now today we're going to be talking with Stefan Oh, through a translator. That is

Christiana rivolta. And she is the sales and marketing manager. cafe Florian. And we cover a host of various topics, from history to operation to how they view outside movements of coffee, what they look for and their staff and how they train them. And this is a very unique operation for a coffee bar. And again, I'm excited to share this conversation with you as we kind of talk about what goes into that experience at Cafe Florian. So without further ado, here now is my conversation with the art director at the now 300 year old cafe Florian, Stefano, step out of it. cristianos Stefano, thank you so much for taking the time to be on keys to the shop. To say it's an honor is quite an understatement. Because I've been reading about the cafe floriana ever since I got into coffee and read my first coffee history book. So to get to explore the inner workings of this is quite an honor. Thank you.



Stefanos 07:00

You're welcome.



Chris Deferio 07:02

Well, I, I guess we should just start right from the beginning here. And one of the things I'm most impressed with is beyond the longevity and congratulations, by the way, this is celebration of your 300th year as an operating coffee bar. So Bravo to you. We talk about different epochs, different movements and coffee throughout history. And one of the most intriguing things is that cafe Florian has been around for all of them pretty fun. Well, not all of them, but the modern ones, over 300 years. What has changed over the years? And maybe a better question would be what are the major chapters or categories that define the evolution of cafe Florian from 1720 until now



Stefanos 07:55

Caffe Florian opened in 1720 and the name of the owner was Floriano Francesconias going from the name of the owner comes the name of the caffe florian. Actually, at the beginning the real name was "Alla Venezia Trionfante". It means to the triumphant Venice, but it was quite a long the name. And so all the all the customers start saying let's go to Florian's and not to Alla Venezia Trionfante. When cafe verdean opened, Venice was was not so rich as it was in the past, Napoleon was about to come and conquer the city. But Venice was still striving to be the place of let's say richness and fun. And so the carnival starting being held and played all around the city. When caffe florian opened the world we're together with Caffe Florian about 200 other coffee houses in the city and coffee started being much appreciated by the illuminists because it was differently from wine. It

was a drink that could be drunk without getting drunk. Okay, so you could steal a thing and speak by drinking coffee. So it became the drink of the illuminists Caffè Florian was completely restored in the middle of the 19th century. So, if you come to Venice nowadays what you see is not the original Caffè Florian when it opened in 1720, but it is exactly as it was when it was restored in 1863. So you come in a place that is exactly as it was. I'd say 200 years ago, more or less, and it is still nowadays, the place where all the people who come to Venice go to have a coffee, relax and breathe the history. So it is still appreciated both by customers coming from all over the world and by Venetians as well.



Chris Deferio 10:26

So in those years, the way that the cafe Florian entertains guests and the way that it operated, I mean, come curious about that. And the way that is operating now, there's many many components of what it does there's, there's the events, there's there's art, there's the the food, the coffee, was it always all of those things, or did those get added on as years went by? I don't necessarily chain though.



Stefanos 10:56

So when as I told you before, when the cafe opened the coffee mean the drink was highly appreciated, but it was also quite expensive. So it was accompanied by cups, saucers, spoons of very high quality and that kind of course links are in a museum nowadays in Venice, you can see them in Venice. So we don't have those kind of porcelains, of course they did. 18th century but still today exactly as in the past, the service of the cafeteria is made on silver trays with porcelain. That means cups, saucers, and tea pots and so on have high quality of silver and high quality porcelain.



Chris Deferio 11:54

What other things from the past are a part of the way that the cafe Florian operates today.



Stefanos 12:01

Besides the service on silver trays that we also have some kind of stuff. Okay your food that we stay disturbed because many things that we have belonged to the tradition and the tradition links in Venice and went to Egypt and the way how we serve the liquors and the hot chocolates is the same as it was in the past.



Chris Deferio 12:27

So as you have been around for so long, obviously there are some really great stories that are part of what you talk to guests about or what people can read about. And I wonder what are some of your favorite stories to share were the more intriguing stories that you share with guests and history buffs, because I imagine there's very many historians that come to visit you that have taken place under the roof of the cafe Florian



Stefanos 12:55

as you said, there are so many stories about Caffè Florian and each guest maybe one of the most famous is a story about Giacomo Casanova. They say that when he escaped from prison before going to France, he couldn't do anything but have a break at Caffè Florian to drink his last coffee in Venice that another story is about Lord Byron. Before going to Greece and dying there, he was used to come to Venice, and when he was here, he liked swimming so much from St. Mark square to the Lido islands. And they say that after all this kind of exercise, he loved to go back to St. Mark square and go to Caffè Florian and have a great day. They're eating and drinking. They also say that he met his lovers there,



Chris Deferio 14:05

And then this is the story related to a quite famous Italian woman. She was a March Madness. The name was Louisa zappy. She had quite an interesting life. She loved Venice. And once she organized a huge party for 400 people, she invited all these guests and she dressed them she spent lots of money for all the dresses and also, when she entered semi square, she used to be accompanied by two beautiful and big servants and two Leo parts and that night she compelled all her guests to drink only champagne. All night long and cafe floriana was open just for her and her guests all night long serving champagne to everyone when she died, she was quite poor.



Stefanos 15:17

finally Ernest Hemingway everyone knows that he likes to drink. So he went to Harry's Bar to to Brianna's, who was his friend, and he drank bellinis there but then he used to come to a cafe Florian and drink Aramani. Aramani is quite a famous wine here. He's a red wine cultivated in the vintage County, and he's really good and expensive.



Chris Deferio 15:47

Yeah. Wow. So many, there's probably too many to count in terms of stories that you could tell through 300 years. I want to know what has trying inspired to help, cafe Florian stay open for 300 years. At one point I imagine there's the business of the cafe itself. And in then at another point, I imagine it turns into a historical landmark that's protected as a part of a culture of Venice, and that's just my guests but I want to know what what has led to it being hoping for so long in Florida.



Stefanos 16:29

Why Caffè Florian is the oldest coffee house in Italy because and why we are still in activity after 300 years, because when the Caffè Florian was born, it was a coffee house. Nowadays, it is still a coffee house. So no changes in that kind of job than working in operating with the the customers and the clientele that we have, and then you must think that we are in Venice In the 19th century, when all the other cities all around the world were changing, and Venice remained the same, the middle class that could change things was poor in Venice. So the city stayed as it was, and the Caffè Florina kept on serving coffees and chocolates and liquors and so on. And the reason why, after all these years we're still in activity is that we still keep that kind of tradition still on we keep serving in a particular way that nowadays we are the only coffee house to have.



Chris Deferio 17:43

That is excellent. How has the ownership changed over the years as you are currently? I mean, is it still in a family is it passed down just by interested parties? How How has that structure evolved? There close to the sacred So



Stefanos 18:00

at the beginning it was a Venetian family, the francesconi Family. Remember, the first foreigner was floriana, Francesco and he, and then his nephew Valentino, and he's grand nephew a few Antonio continued activity. In the middle of the 19th century when the Caffè Florian was completely restored. The owners were made of a partnership of people, okay, other families that kept the cafe until the beginning of the 20th century when in other Venetian family, the familiar with started running the business 10 years ago in 2009, a group of Italian and entrepreneurs Among them there is also one of the members of the Fendi family the fashion brand and became the new owners of the Caffè Florian and they are now running the business.



Chris Deferio 18:57

I'm interested to know a little bit more about the running of the business itself. So the structure of the way the cafe runs, we know that it takes a lot of different roles, employee structures and things like that. So how does it run structurally speaking what roles are needed for its operation today?



Stefanos 19:21

Let's speak about the cafetorium. In during the high season, the high season starts in March and at the end of October, there are about 90 people working at cafetorium. You have a director and the three assistance who manages the all the Caffe Florian activities. And then we have a group of 29 waiters, they work in pairs, and you can distinguish them and they are all about the tie that they have around their neck. So the first later have Black but beyond the me chef have in gray beyond white the second waiters wear and white but beyond during the day they usually wear a white jacket. Why in the beginning they were in tuxedo or a frack according to the rules so first winners were Frank and why the second winners and the Demi chef, wear a tuxedo and then you have barman, counter flex, our executive chef and the whole his stuff who prepares coffees chocolate cakes, salads, club sandwiches, and so on in them during the high season. We also have our orchestra. They are 10 people all music masters in they play all day long. They shift of course that they play all day long from the morning till midnight When the caffe florian closes



Chris Deferio 21:05

I want to dig deeper into that question or into that subject a little bit. With all of those people with 90 people working and the assistance to the director, etc. I'm always interested in learning how communication actually happens so that everybody knows their role when they enter their shift. So are there meetings are there are their communications over email or groups, group chats and things like that to keep people on the same page and organized?



Stefanos 21:37

there no cars so we are compelled to speak to meet and speak with one another. So it really isn't any different from best we have meetings and so on, but we speak with each other I mean, when a shift ends and the new one starts If there is any new things to know, they meet and speak in then of course there is the director as a supervisor, but everything we work in order to be just like a perfect Swiss watch, everything should be perfect and all

the time in then there is also a huge an important selection about this staff before hiring them for good. We cooperate with many schools in order to have to train new people and new stuff. And if someone is able to insert inside this kind of structure, and to understand how the colleagues work together and what is necessary to do, this person could become part of the stuff.



Chris Deferio 22:53

So it sounds as though the training happens partially in you expect them to be trained, almost be for becoming staff, but then there's the staff training itself when they enter in to employment, the cafe Florian, I wonder if you could describe a little bit about how intensive The training is for somebody who, let's say somebody wants to become a barman or barista? What kind of training do they undergo to to be able to get to the point where there's confidence in their performance?



Stefanos 23:29

we start selecting our people, our staff doing stage. So people start coming in stage and if they are skilled enough, they return doing another stage after that they are hired for a period and during that period, they are trained by their colleagues who already works in that role. This is for any kind of job inside because it's really hard. You should be in counterplay environment and waiter, even an assistant director Okay, no changes you need to do in long period of training. And if you go on then you can be hired bye bye by the company and you become a member of the staff of the cafeteria.



Chris Deferio 24:26

What would you say are the virtues of a an ideal employee of cafe Florian.



Stefanos 24:34

if we think of the waiter, they have to speak two languages apart from Italian English of course and then another one, let's say a good presence if not handsome, but at least they have to look handsome this in they have to be elegant when they move when they serve. They have to learn a special way to serve and to into speak with the customers. That's why we every year keeps lessons about the history of Caffè Florian, the city of Venice and the traditions so that when customers come and they can relate to the customer and they can speak with him and give all the information and tell us the story that you heard before, they found out about Caffè Florian in Venice in other curiosity about the service of

the Caffe Florian when the waiter come to your table with the trade, he doesn't need to ask a quarter the coffee who are the cappuccino, the cake or the green, but he knows he remembers exactly who order what so that when you have your trade before you you have exactly what you have ordered. You don't have to change or to us or nothing.



Chris Deferio 26:01

very interesting and very important obviously, especially at that level, when you look at coffee bars around you that I would say may not have as stringent of standards of service. And this is interesting to me that what would frustrate you the most about the service you get in other coffee bars having been used to the experience of service at Cafe Florian



Stefanos 26:30

The difference between classes you are now and then let's say your coffee houses or bar is of course that we are the oldest coffeehouse but we still are both a place where tourists come, but also Venetians come so carefully and is still today. A lovely place. Okay, you can meet any kind of people from, let's say commoners, to movie stars, politicians, riders, and so on, and it doesn't matter. They are all together. They're inside caffeine free and sipping their coffee. There is a book written by two American economist. Their name is B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. And the title of the book is "the experience economy". In the Preface of this book, they ask a questions to the readers, they say, Why should I go to Caffe Florian and have my coffee there instead of going to, in other words bar let's say to the trains, a bar in the train station, see the coffee, it is always a coffee. The difference is that if you go to the train station or in a normal bar, you just sip your coffee and get the energy, a little bit of the energy that is contained in the coffee cup. When you go to Caffe Florain you make it journey through history. So what we have, and what we give is experience



Chris Deferio 28:13

Well said, Well said, and we often talk on the show about how experience in the cafe is the thing that people are looking for most of the time whether they know it or not, obviously, you're delivering that above and beyond where I think most of us are, are. And you've been developing that for so long. So comparing service when you have such high standards for service and the way that you move when you serving customers, and I'm curious to know, because there people have been trained in other coffee bars and other cafes before coming to you. And I wonder if you could detail maybe some of the things

that you need to on people to do like the bad habits that you see in maybe the average service that will not stand at the the florie on that you need to train out of people and why it's a big deal and why it makes a difference. See, a lot



Stefanos 29:18

When people come to work at the Caffè Florian, they already know something about the place they're going into. So what they learned before should be forgotten. They start in you. That's why we have younger people coming from the hotel school. So when they finish the school, they just come so sometimes we are we are the first listen the first job that they have. So they start from the highest level. And on the contrary, when people come and work after any other job experiencing any other coffee house or bar They are trained from the beginning by our stuff. And so the first word that they are told are forget what you learned so far. Now you start fresh.



Chris Deferio 30:12

Great. So if you sum up the standard for service that you have, is it the attention to detail that's the most important is that presence and consistency? What are the most important aspects of service that you would say define or separates your service from other experiences that people might have Legos or pupil talented?



Stefanos 30:39

What makes Caffè Florian unique is the sum of many things service attention to detail, consistency, the standard despite prepared to serve people and so on. But you have to start from the place where Caffè Florian is so St. mark Square is a beautiful place where you can see it. And then you can see the side onto my square or sit inside the rooms of cafe Florian. So starting from the ambience and the atmosphere, you feel like being in a sort of, let's say museum where the time stopped. And then while your city there, you are served by a beautiful staff in a quite unique service made on silver trays, you have a high quality products, food, beverage, and so on. So is everything put together that creates what we call the Freudian experience. And that's what our guests usually said after they go out. And this is the reason why, even if Venice is quite full of tourists, we have customers who come for the first time in the When they come back to Venice, even if there are lots of places to see, because man, this is beautiful in any way and the men place where, you know, they come back to Caffè Florian, always so even if they are tourist we have regulars among tourists.



Chris Deferio 32:17

One what are some of the biggest challenges in you say that this operates like us has operate like a Swiss watch. And I imagine that standard has not changed in 300 years. And so being able to accomplish that, in the midst of things that you can't control, it can be a challenge. And I wonder what are some of the biggest challenges in the course of the cafe is history or or even recently?



Stefanos 32:50

the answer to the question is quite unusual, because because Caffè Florian, works perfectly and let's see the real challenges. not related to service or coffee, or customers. The real challenge started about 30 years ago when we decided to, let's say relieve and link between contemporary art and contemporary art. Why? Because at the end of the 19th century, the major of the city of Venice, the name was Riccardo sympatico. He invented the project of an art exhibition that should be held all around the city on things that are distribution was held for the first time two years later. These are the starting of this project. So in 1895, the first Vietnam era started and the projects of the Denali was totally realized inside one of the rooms of Caffè Florian. This is a historical effect, okay. connected to this factor. We hand concurrently with the vnl it in art exhibition inside the Caffè Florian, we invite an artist he or she could be turned in or information on it doesn't matter I mean, but the important thing is that these artists create a site specific installation for Caffè Florian. So during the Venalli period, you can see a space inside Caffè Florian who is completely opposite to what everyone is usually in its usual dress. So you see contemporary art inside a sort of museum. And this installation is both by the ownership of guffin Freon and belongs to the Furion contemporary art collection. There are some art pieces that we borrowed to museums all around the world in Paris and New York and London during the years. So this is our challenge. The challenge could be sort of solar trans, you know, just imagine a 19th century ambience, okay, we ruled gold, velvet, sofas, paintings, Amazon, put together with a contemporary art installation. So the difference, what you see is something that is quite strong. But inside a factory on these two worlds, these two art words really live together in quite a beautiful way. So you you just see the people getting into the room and say, Oh, my God, what is this? This is Caffè Florian Yes, this is a contemporary interpretation Caffè Florian



Chris Deferio 35:54

Well, I kind of liked the idea that the challenge one of the challenges that you're facing Certainly tackling is is related to art in the cafe and so many people listening to this program have know their own challenges with hanging out in the coffee shop. It's thing

that has been done for so long and we're still challenged by it



Stefanos 36:15

Our challenge is to be still linked to the past giving a high quality service completely refusing to come to terms with new ways of serving coffees and thinking of the takeaway. For instance, takeaway is something that we don't do and won't do. The reason why cafetorium works. takeaway is not an experience. So we want to take away but we want every day actually wins this kind of challenge because we have people coming into cafetorium and wanting to to leave This kind of experience that we can give them that if you think of art nowadays art is not just an art piece to be hanging somewhere but it is a means of communication that's why so many brands have their own Art Foundation let's think of Prada Pino they all have their own museum and foundation where they collect the some art pieces coming from private collections on just speak up all around the world. So Venice is all around the world. One of the capital, okay are the main city related to art and Caffè Florian hosting art exhibition is connected to the present. So we have a foot in the past because we have tradition and we go on keeping these kind of traditions alive, but we look at the same time We look at the future.



Chris Deferio 38:05

That's very interesting to me. When we consider for us in this audience so many are coffee shop owners and managers and professionals and there has been so many different technological innovations and different modes of service within the community of coffee and you know be having one foot in the past and and having a connection to the present. I hear what you're saying about to go coffee that obviously would ruin the experience. I wonder what other ways are you connected to the present when it comes to the coffee service when in or just the operations of cafe Florian in general, what ways are you connected to what's happening in modern coffee, while still maintaining your historical presence as Florian



Stefanos 38:59

Caffè Florian is modern Exactly. Because it is still linked to the past. Maybe it's not so easy. It's not so easy to explain. But this is the real reason why cafetorium means different things to our customers related in comparison with, let's say, usual coffee houses or bar because we in this kind of times where life is so frantic in urine from one place to the other, when you come to cafetorium you know, that's what you are going to have a special relaxing time. So your watch stops in in the exact moments when you enter. So it's

something completely different from any other experience. That's like a for for young is so unique. That's why he's still alive today. After 300 years you should come and experience it is something that you until you you go there you cannot fully comprehend because if you I mean I suppose in your life you have been to go to any museum or let's say some ancient palace, okay, when you go there you saw beautiful furniture and decorations and so on but you have to go there and just watch you don't have to touch anything because anything is protected you know by alarms and so on. When you go to cafeteria is exactly like being in a beautiful palace. And you can taste and touch and experience anything. Okay, you can just get there in the morning and stay there until leaving and watching outside and see the world running around. So Mark square, okay is something that you cannot see and experience in any other place. That's the reason why we're staying there.



Chris Deferio 41:15

Excellent. No. Well, I'd like to ask all of our guests generally about things that they would advise to the listeners, what kind of advice if you had a group of coffee bar owners to give advice to about how maybe they can increase the level of their experience in their coffee bars. They're not going to be the cafe Florian, but they can do better, we can always do better can so if you could offer advice to them as to how to elevate their experiences and their coffee bars, that'd be great.



Stefanos 41:57

very good selection of the staff The first thing, the second is to train the staff in order for them to have a more human relationship with the customers. They should be polite, but thoughtful. Venice is really the, the ideal place because imagine you don't have cars, okay? You just go on your feet, wherever you want to go and why going you meet people. So, in Venice, you start friendship by meeting the same people every day, simply by going on foot to work. It's quite strange. It's not something usual, but when it is a place where people used to meet and speak and so this kind of human behavior should be held with all the customers okay? being polite, of course, because you are working there and they are customers. But just being kind and impolite in then, of course, the quality of the product that you serve



Chris Deferio 43:03

Brilliant. And speaking of the quality of the products you serve, and as we wrap up here my final question to you were I to make the trip to the Florian and Venice What should I drink? What should I eat when I'm at the cafe? What would you What are your top choices



Stefanos 43:26

every season is the right season to counter madness and every word is the right time to go to confess. Because according to the day, the hour, the season, you can see or better you can admire Venice in a different way. And according to the time of the day, when you are seated at caffe florian you can see the coffee tastes like a cappuccino or Celebrate when the Prosecco sparkling wine



Chris Deferio 44:09

So excellent answer and we really appreciate your time and explaining some of the inside operations of cafe Florian and I hope that many of us get the opportunity to go and visit and see for ourselves and taste for ourselves and experience and in certainly hearing about this has is really inspired a lot of us to raise our level of experience that we give our customers and so I really thank you and happy 300 year birthday. Thank you so much



Stefanos 44:44

to you too, because you are celebrating your 300th episode. So yes, thank you to you as well.



Chris Deferio 44:56

Well, I hope that you all really enjoyed that episode, and that It gave you an appreciation for what you do in the coffee shop. When we think about a cafe that's been around for 300 years. It is, so many people's lives, you just measure it and how many people's lives have gone in and out of that coffee shop, and how much impact that service experience has had, on families, on individuals on politicians and artists, musicians, etc. All of our coffee bars are doing the same thing wherever we are. Now, we may not be in Venice we're in might not be 300 years old. But we are serving an experience that brings an impact to people's lives. And the question is, how are we honing in that experience? How are we viewing what we're doing? Because we are creating change, and whether that's for good or for not? That is up to the intention behind what we do and that's what One of the things I love about this conversation is how much vision and intention and an attention to detail there is in in what they do at Cafe Florian. And we can all learn a lesson and take a page from their playbook here to help us serve our guests well, and who knows with the power of the guest experience on your side, maybe your cafe will be the next one to be 300 years old and, you know, keys to the shop. If we're still around then we'll we'll have you on the show and interview you too.

