

How to (Re)Open Restaurants During a Pandemic According to Francesco Panella



by [Stefania Virone Vittor](#) editorial staff | May 31, 2020

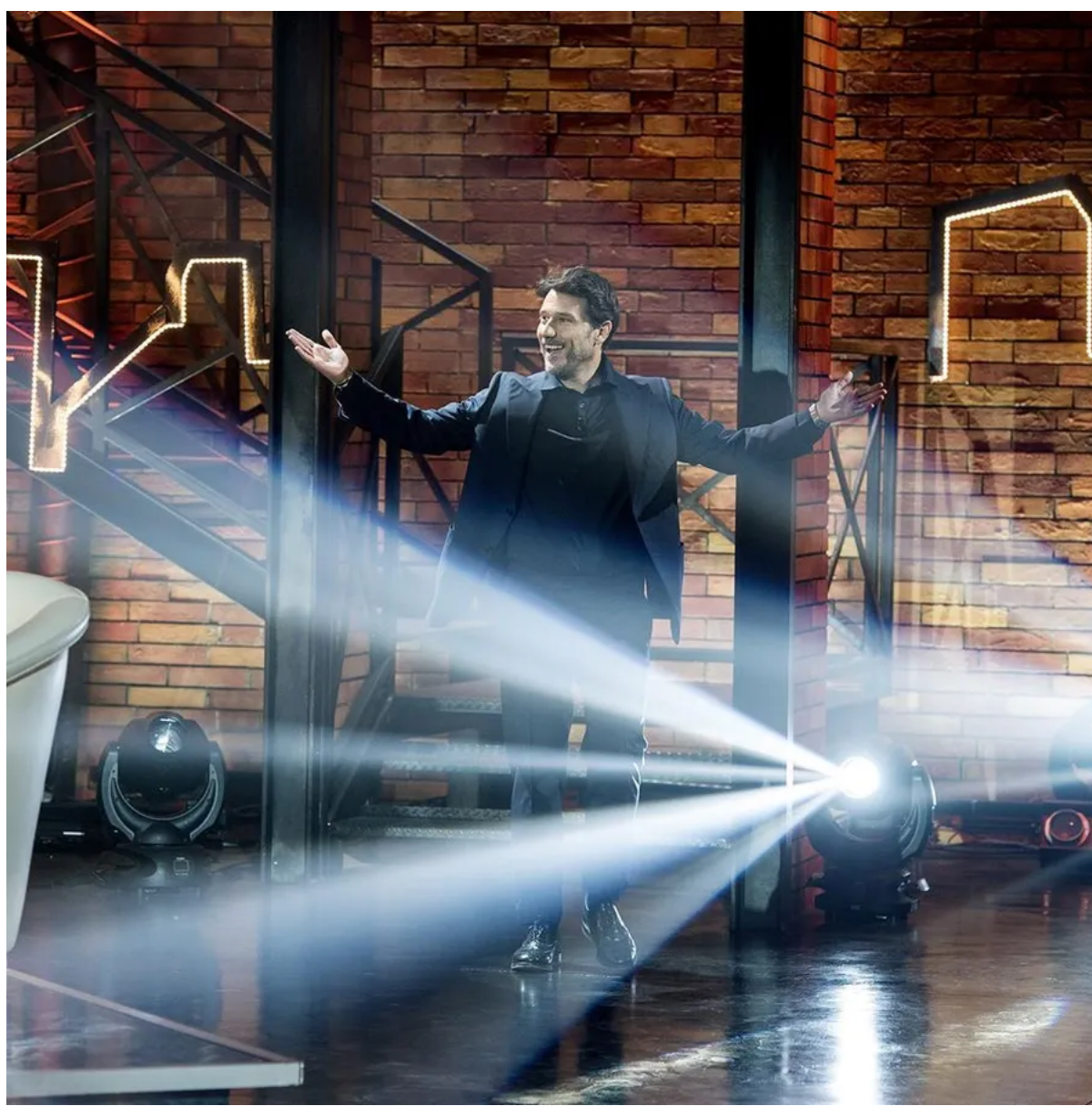


The Roman restaurateur, who won over the hearts of both New York and many Hollywood stars, shares his vision for the future – in a positive light.

[Francesco Panella](#) deeply loves his work – an element ever-present for him even as a child, in the kitchen of his family's Trastevere restaurant in Rome [Antica Pesa dal 1922](#). Panella's job represents an endless passion, an emotion he loves to channel through his restaurants. A famous TV personality in Italy for the show *Little Big Italy* and *The Brooklyn Man*, Francesco Panella is perfect for the role of Communication Director for the Italian Chefs Association New York [AICNY](#). And at this particularly difficult time, his words come straight tug at the heartstrings of each and every one of us – even those who don't work directly in the restaurant business but love the pleasure of good food and conviviality.

On a popular Italian TV program recently aired, Francesco Panella shared his opinions and thoughts on the catering and restaurant industry in the days of Covid-19 – and who better to survey the situation than Panella, since he has direct experience in the field, both in Italy and in the United States? In fact, Francesco Panella left Rome to conquer New York, by opening [Antica Pesa Brooklyn](#) in 2012, followed by Manhattan's [Feroce](#) in 2017. At Panella's restaurants, he carries on the Italian culinary tradition – that his brother [chef Simone Panella](#) has also spread through Rome with unmatched creativity and dedication. The American success of Francesco Panella and his restaurants finds its confirmation in his large clientele, which counts

VIP names like Leonardo di Caprio, Quentin Tarantino, and Charlize Theron among his many admirers. (Check out the photo gallery above for an endless list of Italian and international stars – all fans of Panella’s passion for Italian cuisine.)



Though Francesco Panella has lived in New York since 2012, he managed to return to Italy just before the lockdown began. Ever the optimist, this Roman gentleman has turned a sad situation into an opportunity – to spend more time with his family and to help others. From temporarily converting himself into a “professor” for young food and beverage students to collaborating with Italian chefs of AICNY, Panella has contributed to many efforts to aid those in need. And now, he says it’s time to take a stand – so the Italian Chefs Association New York has created a non-profit organization called “[Italians Feed America](#),” which served to prepare one hundred thousand meals for people in need during the coronavirus emergency. As communication director of AICNY, Panella took the occasion of the TV program to thank his chefs friends, connected live as a virtual audience, for their wonderful collaboration – all Italian cuisine superstars in the Big Apple, from [Rocco DiSpirito](#) and [Ciro Iovine](#) to [Fabrizio Facchini](#) and Barbara Pollastrini. Just to name a few.

During the interview, Francesco Panella addressed the delicate issue of what the future of catering and restaurants will look like – an industry in serious difficulty due to the pandemic. Panella emphasizes that it’s time to get inventive and work in ways we we never expected to: "Now is a moment of emergency that must be faced as such. I believe that the two essential factors in this period are communication and focus on security. Where the benchmark for a restaurant was once its name, a dish on the menu or a certain ingredient, now the guiding light to follow is definitely security," Panella stated confidently.

Between social distancing, masks, gloves, and all the (necessary) precautions for the virus, it is difficult to combine safety with the pleasure of being at the dinner table together. With his proverbial positivity, Francesco Panella answered smiling: "There was a little bit of confusion in my opinion, but fortunately we have fantastic engineers, excellent professors, creative people and designers, who have given us solutions that are beautiful, innovative and also very technological!"

Hearing Francesco Panella speak about the future of the catering and restaurant industry is reassuring: "Many things will change in catering. Thankfully, architects, designers, etc. have done a lot of amazing things – on food preservation, for example. We will have a hot refrigerator that will keep the dishes at a certain temperature and will be served in two minutes because they have already been cooked before and put in the hot refrigerator safely." Another innovation due to the ban on paper menus concerns the technology closest to us – smartphones: "The menus will be directly on your mobile phone. Thanks to the QR code that goes over the order with the waiter and the tablet, it's you who interacts directly with the kitchen by sending the order." There is no lack of curious novelties at this time, such as special copper pots with antibacterial material, which will also serve as a dish and will allow the chef to bring the dish directly to the table recreating the direct experience. The importance of the experience will also be redesigned with regard to the cocktail ritual at the counter before sitting at the table for dinner: "When we enter, we will no longer be able to stand at the counter to enjoy the cocktail before dinner. It will be a direct one-on-one experience at a safe distance at the table."

An open letter to restaurateurs in the days of Covid-19

At the end of his television interview, Francesco Panella put on his glasses to read a message to the restaurant industry and its workers – a love story with a truly happy ending.

"A Love Story" by Francesco Panella

Work is not a job if you don't do it with passion. How many times have we heard that phrase? Many. How many times is it really like that? Just a few. I'm one of them.

Being a restaurateur is more than a passion for me – it is life. I was born in a restaurant, and it's been my home ever since.

The noise of the kitchen in full service, the screams of the chef, the waiters moving to the rhythm of the courses, the voices of the diners, the laughter, the cries. You would probably think: "What a mess!" – a mess that, to my ears, is better than rock'n'roll.

Catering, however, also requires certain sacrifices: It means not having schedules and it means taking risks – because a dish doesn't get a second chance and if you make a mistake, you've failed. It means questioning yourself every day, traveling miles and miles to find the perfect ingredient. To give up parties and the family sometimes.

Because you're there day after day – going back and forth from the kitchen and the lounge to the customers. And in the end, you don't know what time it is or how long you've been there. You work while others celebrate. You concentrate while others relax their nerves, and you don't drink while others enjoy a good glass of wine...

Yet there is something that keeps you there – nailed down – that makes you get up every morning with just one great awareness: that with your dishes, you can make people happy. Yes, people. How important are they? They matter to me more than anything else, and I try to please them by doing the simplest thing in the world: feeding them.

That's why I'm going to keep doing what I do and I know it's going to be hard – that we're going to want to throw in the towel and give up – but I want to tell you something, dear colleagues: Even though the Covid-19 has tried to bring us down, and even though many of us have failed to reopen, we must remember that what we do is important. We make people forget their problems, and we make them feel the way they should: special. We take care of them... and that's why we can't give up.

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