

**Dominic Orsini**  
**Winery Chef**  
**Silver Oak Cellars**



Although he says “I’m not as Italian as my name implies,” Dominic Orsini credits his Italian heritage and his grandmother with steering him toward a life in food. “My grandmother was actually Pennsylvania Dutch,” says Orsini, “but she married an Italian and spent her life proving that she could cook as well as her Italian sisters-in-law.” Summers spent eating his fill of strawberries and raspberries from his grandparents’ garden imbued Orsini with an appreciation of how food is grown, and he still carries his grandmother’s handwritten recipes for gnocchi, cannoli and zucchini bread.

This early love of food led Orsini to restaurant jobs as soon as he was old enough to wash pots and pans. But dishwashing didn’t deter him, and by the time he was a junior in high school “a light went on” in his head and he knew he wanted to be a professional chef. In 1995, he graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park.

After culinary school Orsini took a position on a small cruise ship, but when a good friend invited him for a visit to Healdsburg in Sonoma County, he ended up abandoning the Caribbean for wine country. “Wine was such a big part of my culinary education,” says Orsini, “and for a chef, wine country is the place to be.”

With the exception of a two-year stint as sous chef in New York’s legendary Waldorf Astoria hotel, which he describes as a “great adventure and learning experience,” Orsini’s talent and skills have been honed in Napa Valley. Prior to joining Silver Oak Cellars in 2008, Orsini was executive chef at Brannan’s Grill and barVino in Calistoga, where he created a menu of innovative, casual cuisine made to go with California wines. Prior to that Orsini was banquet chef de cuisine at The Meritage Resort in Napa, and from 2002-2003 he was catering chef de cuisine at Roux Restaurant in St. Helena, named one of the “Top 50 Restaurants 2002” by the San Francisco Chronicle.

At Silver Oak Orsini’s focus is to create menus and recipes that “let the wine shine.” Describing his style as “soulful” Italian with big city “sex appeal,” Orsini draws from Italian, but also French and Spanish culinary traditions. “A meal should be a snapshot of a moment in time,” says Orsini. “It should reflect the weather, the time of day, what’s fresh at the market, and the mood of the guests attending.”

Orsini is excited about the gardens at Silver Oak’s new Oakville winery and plans to rely on it for many of the dishes he’ll prepare. And although he loves working with small, local growers and purveyors in Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino, he hopes eventually to produce several ingredients himself, including olives from the winery’s grounds, curing his own prosciutto and making his own ricotta and mozzarella.

Orsini has passed the Introductory Sommelier Course of the Court of Master Sommeliers and is currently studying for the Certified Sommelier Exam. He lives in Napa with his wife, Penelope, a pastry chef, and their two sons.

# # #