

HARLEM WORLD

SPRING 2003

ONE ON ONE **Italy, Africa & Harlem** Local and World flavors combined for a new Renaissance.

Harlem World: How did you get into the bakery business?

Leah Abraham: I married into it. My husband's name is Nino Settepani. Settepani means 7 breads. Our logo symbolizes a loaf of bread. We've been married for 8 years now and have four locations. The Harlem location is a cafe and we've been here since December 2001. Our main production center is in Brooklyn. Everything that we sell, we make, our own chocolate, our own bread. Our store in Brooklyn is wholesale; we do all our baking there. It's a 24-hour production. All our pastries are made during the day; we start the breads in the evening. The following evening we donate our bread to local churches. The cafe is one of the few places in Harlem where you can come and sit down for \$2. And we just got our sidewalk permit, so when weather permits, we'll have tables and chairs outside.

HW: What about the cafe's design?

LA: I designed the place, and worked with an architect. I'm from East Africa, Eritrea, but I spent a good part of my life in the Middle East. My husband's from Italy, so I wanted to combine those, and yet maintain the integrity of the neighborhood. We have marble floors and hardwood. The colors are very earthy and the place curves throughout. I like to be surrounded by pretty things. I created a place that's comfortable and yet pretty.

HW: How has Harlem treated you?

LA: Harlem is a great place! The day we opened, I was rushing to get everything done. It was a very windy morning. People were standing outside, waiting to see what we were doing. I kept saying just give me a few minutes. Finally, I said, I've been working on this for one year, and when I open the door, I want everything to be perfect. There was a woman standing there who said, A year? I've been waiting for you for 30 years! (laughter). We try to maintain the quality of our products. Actually, we have the best coffee-illy. It's very expensive, and very, very good. We sell fresh, loose teas; we don't use tea bags. Our tea doesn't sit on the shelves for a year before we sell it. We sell our pastry products to [places like] Dean & DeLuca and Balducci's. We sell our breads to a lot of restaurants downtown; overall, we sell to about 300 restaurants, to Fairway and better stores. Some people in Harlem are used to going downtown. We try to keep them here. We're making downtown available uptown! I think the variety in this particular neighborhood is limited in terms of places to go for lunch. This is what we do best. If it's good, people will come back.

HW: How about the tourist traffic?

LA: I don't like to disrupt the local clientele. When we have outdoor seating this spring, we'll be able to accommodate them. I welcome them if they come and treat them the best we can. I've asked tour operators to let us know when they intend to come, so we can staff ourselves accordingly.

HW: What are your plans for the future?

LA: We're thinking of doing more food. We have gelato in the summer, and it sells very well. We may do classes in cooking-pastries, cake decorating. We have a bakery here that's fully equipped. We've already done internships with some of the local culinary schools like Boys in the Hood. The young people go through a screening process and go to Brooklyn for a six-week training program. Fairly soon we'd also like to do a series of art and photo shows. We may feature one big name, but will mainly get artists from the community who don't have a gallery. And we may have music night, perhaps jazz. This is what I think the Harlem Renaissance was all about-art. So I want to capture the feeling of our new renaissance, an appreciation for art and the finer things in life.

-By Greg Thomas



Settepani