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# Restaurant Man



## Synopsis

How does a nice Italian boy from Queens turn his passion for food and wine into a nationwide empire? In his intrepid, irreverent, and terrifically entertaining memoir, *Restaurant Man*, Joe Bastianich charts his remarkable culinary journey from his parents' neighborhood eatery to becoming one of the country's most successful restaurateurs, along with his superstar chef partners - his mother, Lidia Bastianich, and Mario Batali. Joe first learned the ropes of the restaurant business from his father, Felice Bastianich, the original *Restaurant Man*, the ultrapragmatic and sharp-eyed owner of a popular red-sauce joint. But years of cleaning chickens and other kitchen drudgery convinced Joe that his destiny lay elsewhere. After a year on Wall Street, however, he realized that his love of food was by now too deeply ingrained, and after buying a one-way ticket to Italy, he spent over a year working in restaurants and vineyards there, developing his own taste and learning everything he could about Italian cuisine. Upon his return to New York, he partnered with his mother to open Becco and soon after joined forces with Mario Batali, an alliance that not only created a string of critically acclaimed and popular restaurants but redefined Italian food in America. *Restaurant Man* is not only a compelling rags-to-riches chronicle but a look behind the scenes at what it really takes to run a restaurant in New York City, the most demanding, fickle, and passionate market in America, from dealing with shady vendors, avaricious landlords, and vitriolic food critics, to day-to-day issues like the cost of linens ("the number-one evil") and bread and butter. Writing vividly in an authentic New York style that is equal parts rock 'n' roll and hard-ass, bottom-line business reality, Joe shares lessons learned from a lifetime spent in restaurants ("Anything you give away for free is bad"), while recounting the stories of his own establishments - including how Del Posto managed to overcome a menu that was initially so ambitious that it could not be executed, to ultimately become the only four-star Italian restaurant in America. Joe speaks frankly about friends and foes, but at the heart of the book is the mythical hero *Restaurant Man*, the old-school, blue-collar guy who stays true to the real secret of his success - watching costs but ferociously dedicating himself to exceeding his customers' expectations and delivering the best dining experience in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I listened to the audiobook version of Restaurant Man, and I'd recommend that as the best way to consume this book. Part "how to" run a restaurant, part history of Italian food in NYC and part biography, Restaurant Man is an engaging look behind the scenes of restaurants and restaurant culture. Joe Bastianich is a great narrator and his depth of knowledge on the subject is clear. The book is best when it's breaking everything down on how a successful restaurant actually works. Joe's journey through his time in Italy and Croatia and his journey through wine and winemaking is especially engaging. The book falters a bit when it starts looking at more contemporary issues, like Joe Bastianich's hard learned lessons on who to go into business with and what things don't work. Perhaps that part was a little too fresh in the writer's mind to have the depth of perspective and eloquence in storytelling. Restaurant Man is still required reading for anyone even mildly interested in getting into the restaurant business, and is a smart, funny, and engaging story, well told by its author on the audiobook.

THIS BOOK IS THE BEST I MEAN THE BEST SINCE ANTHONY BOURDAINS KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL! THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT THIS BOOK IS FROM THE VIEW POINT AND EXPERIENCES OF BUYING AND MAKING RESTAURANTS SUCCESSFUL, IT IS ALSO ABOUT ONE MANS EDUCATION INTO THE RESTAURANT AND WINE INDUSTRY. AND COMING OF AGE. JUST THE HISTORY OF HIS FAMILY IS WORTH THE READ. DON'T MISS THIS ONE - I HOPE HE DOES A FOLLOW-UP. BUT IF NOT KEEP ON KEEPING ON "RESTAURANT MAN".

My hope was that this book would describe the realities of the restaurant business, and certain chapters - especially the first - accomplished this and were very engaging. It also was interesting to learn about the "concepts" of various restaurants that Joe Bastianich opened with Mario Batali. It

would have been good if more time had been spent in these two areas, and in really describing other people Mr. Bastianich knew and worked with, such as Chef Batali as a personality, his mother, and what made his mother's and Mario Batali's food great. It also would have been of tremendous interest for him to talk about life in the kitchen and in the front of the house in more detail. Instead, too much time is spent on autobiographical material which wasn't consistently very interesting, and often was superficially treated. Mr. Bastianich no doubt is a tremendous businessman, and some of his business insights are great. The fact that he knows a lot about Italian wines is definitely of less interest, but since he isn't a chef, perhaps he felt he needed to glorify himself by emphasizing his knowledge of wine since he couldn't talk about his great skill in the kitchen. Overall, the book was enjoyable, but a bit too long, and perhaps too much of a self-aggrandizing marketing tool for the author.

Joe Bastianich's *Restaurant Man* is a manifesto on business, the business of food, the business of people, New York business and the business of wine, all colored with red, white and green; the Italian flag, wines and money. Vehemently and aggressively Italian, this restaurant man makes no apologies for being a real bastard about making people cry tears of joy and tears of profound misery. But he'll shake your hand and make you smile about dropping a cool grand for dinner for you and the family. *Restaurant Man* is as much about ego as it is a primer for doing the math of running a successful restaurant, far and away from the "greasy bag of deep-fried easy." More access to information about running a sound operation, you need not. He gives you the percentages on the opening page. Any book that peers out from the inside of a restaurant's imaginary facade, be it the dungeon-esque interworkings of the kitchen, the song and dance of the front of the house, the coke-snorting owners, cash-skimming managers, or any combination thereof, seems to capture a view that is tumultuous, sexy, horrid, tawdry and just a bit maddening in a good way. Any non-PG take on what happens along restaurant row is automatically compared with Anthony Bourdain's now-legendary look at the "culinary underbelly." Yes, there are frank diatribes on the respectability and pay of each member of the team; the vixen-like appeal of the coat girl to the absurd role of a manager to the maître d' that actually runs the place. But, *Restaurant Man* really is all about the business. *Restaurant Man* is more about nonfiction than it is about superheroes. Sure, Bourdain captures the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll of hardened deranged cooks. And Steve Dublanica does the same with *Waiter Rant*, pervasive with tales of criminal managers

and “crop dusting” through the dining room to intoxicate the rude dinner guest with noxious derriere perfume. Bastianich does not use the same formula. The appeal of Restaurant Man is in his original voice. He enjoys wine and pours enough of it in Restaurant Man that you crave Barolo and Brunello while getting drunk on his words that will shake you like a monkey. “We heard a lot of noise when Babbo first opened about our chutzpah in putting out a menu that didn’t seem to have one single Italian on it, no warhorses, no greatest hits not to mention our taste in loud rock & roll- but we stuck to what we believed in, and in fact about 70 percent of the menu has been solid since day one: We always have pig’s feet, tripe and testa, as well as a barbecued squab, pork chop that takes longer to eat than a Dave Matthews concert runs, and fresh branzino cooked with ingredients and flavors that my father even heard of, plus the famous two-minute Calamari Sicilian Lifeguard Style, and a mess of completely imaginative and sexy pastas including the papparadelle Bolognese, which sounds simple enough but blows everyone’s mind. You think you’ve had Bolognese, and then you try Mario’s and you just want to weep at the tragedy your life has been.” Restaurant Man has some captivating writing. Bastianich draws you in with just enough familial histrionics without dowsing you in stories of famous mom. There is very little geeking out about having a mom who is to Italian cooking what Julia is for French fare. The same goes for his partnership with Mario Batali. There is just enough orange-clog talk to color his story without making Restaurant Man all about other people. I do not want to dine in Bastianich’s places after reading Restaurant Man. Instead, I feel at ease giving him \$250 for dinner. He wants to “overdeliver, exceed expectations, every day.” He brings a voice to the menu, to the experience of dining, to paying the price of a night of living high. “What the hell! I [know] the power of good food. I [know] that it can could turn dark into light.”

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