

# Argentine brothers take their ice cream seriously

BY KAREN KRAMER

Although it is the dead of winter, the D'Aloisio brothers are thinking about ice cream. They think about ice cream a lot — the taste, the consistency, how to get fresh ingredients and new flavors to introduce to Americans. Oscar, 43, and his brother Raul, 48, started their store Cones on Bleeker St. near Morton St. eight years ago, bringing the technique of made-from-scratch ice cream and sorbets from their native Buenos Aires.

In some ways they can credit their immersion into the ice cream world to their dislike of Haagen Dazs. While living in Argentina, both brothers were involved in the building profession, Raul as an architect and Oscar as an overseer of construction on commercial spaces.

"I was in Argentina and was working in a construction company doing management for offices and shops," Oscar recalled. "And the company I was working with was doing the design for Haagen Dazs and the building of their flagship stores in Buenos Aires. I didn't like Haagen Dazs. It was too heavy for me. And I said to my brother, 'We should do Argentine ice cream in New York.'"

Raul agreed. "I had been here and I like this city," he said. "And here it would be something different, where in Argentina it's already popular. We were doing some research of areas in Manhattan. We wanted a place with traffic and nightlife. This store came up."

For four months they trained with a master gelato maker in Buenos Aires: In



Villager photo by Elisabeth Robert

Raul D'Aloisio, left, and Oscar D'Aloisio in Cones, their Bleeker St. store

Argentina where the population is 60 percent Italian the taste is for ice cream that is similar to that from Italy, and people in Buenos Aires take their ice cream seriously.

"It's called specifically artisanal ice cream or artisanal gelato," explained Oscar. "People know when they go to a place if the ice cream is good or not. There are a couple

of flavors you try out to know if the place is good. For example when you go to a place you try the lemon and you try the zabaglione. A store can't use false flavoring."

It's a philosophy the brothers decided to adhere to faithfully when they opened their shop in New York. "For the banana we use real banana, that kind of thing," Oscar continued. "We squeeze lemons fresh. By hand. We use like 60 lemons for that. The grapefruits too. Each flavor is made specially. Others use a premix and add flavorants. It's cheaper and easier but I don't like that because the taste is different and the flavor is different. It's like the difference when you make your own pasta sauce in your house or you buy a can of sauce. You can tell if you use fresh tomatoes."

Since the brothers do everything themselves, along with two helpers, they are involved in all areas of production and the workdays are long. During the summer season when the ice cream sells quickly they often go through two rounds of flavors a day. Each morning they arrive at the store early and start by making a list of what sold best the day before. Then they purchase the fruit that is needed. About midmorning they receive the delivery of the milk and the cream and then start the production.

"Just one flavor from scratch takes you 50 minutes," Oscar said. "It takes 40 minutes to cook and then 10 minutes in the batch freezer. In that machine, which is called a pasteurizer, you start adding the milk, the cream, for example, the bananas, the sugar, and then you mix it all together at a certain temperature. When it cools off we just take it out and put it in the batch freezer and that's it."

The brothers grew up in a typical middle-class family in Buenos Aires where their father worked for the railroad, dispatching cars. In Argentina, although Oscar worked primarily as a construction site manager, he had another passion: singing.

"I used to be a classical singer," he said. "A baritone-bass is my kind of voice and I was singing professionally in a chorus over there for 10 years. At first I was studying flute and there was a group of people and they were doing some Monteverdi, some church music, all classical. This group need-

ed a bass so they asked me if I could participate. So then I started singing. I was working in construction from 9 to 5 and then from 8 to 11 I had to go to the theater every night. I did that for 15 years."

During this time Raul was finishing his master's degree in architecture and doing his own buildings in Buenos Aires. He came to New York in '89 and worked designing museums. Although he doesn't work professionally as an architect anymore he still keeps an interest in it.

"The last thing I designed was our store," he said. "I still do research. I'm very active. I read about it a lot. I write. I always like art." Raul's love of art has helped him develop a finely tuned aesthetic that carries over into the culinary, and he's generous about praising cooks or restaurants he likes. "When we decided to open the store we saw the need in New York City for a really high-quality ice cream because here you always get that Mister Softee stuff," he said. "Some people like Mario Batali [the restaurateur and owner of Babbo on Waverly Pl.]; they make really good ice cream. I really have respect for people who do good food."

Each of the brothers has a favorite flavor. For Oscar it's zabaglione, a creamy ice cream made with sweet wine. Sometimes he'll experiment just for himself, adding different types of wines. For Raul the favorite ice cream is dulce de leche, which has a slightly caramel taste. "In Argentina dulce de leche is

*Every day the gelato is made from scratch using fresh fruit and natural flavors.*

like peanut butter over here," he said. "It's very, very, very popular."

They invented a flavor using mate (pronounced MAH-tay), which is a green tea from Argentina that many South Americans drink throughout the day, the way Americans drink coffee.

"That came about because we were using green tea powder from Japan and the guy who used to provide us with the green tea powder lost a shipment," Oscar said. "So we thought, why don't we try with mate. And the customers love that. It's much more popular than the Japanese tea. The chocolate sorbet with white chocolate chips — my brother came up with that one because people were asking for some crunchiness on the sorbet. We also tried a rice flavor but that wasn't too popular."

Raul credits his father for the work ethic and attention to detail that infuses the making of the ice cream.

"My father told me, 'Do one thing and do it right,'" he said. That's what we do over here. We don't do any coffee, nothing like that. Just pure and exclusively ice cream. Small storeowners are successful because they do a good job and they love what they do. We've been here for eight years and we didn't open another store. Because you know once your business grows, quality is very difficult to control. We like what we do and we never brag about it. We do it humble and we do it good. We could have had any kind of shop but we love ice cream."

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