

“Renaissance on the beach” epitomized by 16th century fresco at Sale e Pepe®, Marco Island, Fla.

MARCO ISLAND, Fla. (February 24, 2006) — At Sale e Pepe on Marco Island, Southwest Florida’s quintessentially authentic Italian restaurant, nothing evokes “renaissance on the beach” as well as the 12-foot high hand-painted replica of a 416-year old masterpiece by Jacopo Zucchi, artist in residence to the Medici court, chief assistant for Vatican decorations, and honored with preparing the funeral decorations for Michelangelo.

Zucchi’s original fresco, located in the Palazzo Ruspoli in Rome, inspired contemporary artist Rossen Tonkov, commissioned by Sale e Pepe’s owners, because of its large scale and grandeur as well as its powerful symbolic imagery depicting the constant balance of church and state power, an eternal Italian theme.

Aesthetically, the fresco’s colors and shapes complement the restaurant’s intricate mosaic floors, carved marble detailing, historic Italian tapestries and paintings, and 400-year-old antiques. The final affect is a vision of an ancient seaside Italian restaurant. Tonkov, a Bulgarian native, was struck by the beauty of the palette used in the interior design of Sale e Pepe—stones, fabrics and fine objects – and the golden travertine walls providing the backdrop to the masterpiece.

The fresco depicts a regal and impressive woman, papal crown in one hand, and the crown of the emperor of Rome in the other, commanding the focal point of the restaurant and looking out over the grotto-like intimate dining alcoves that distinguish Sale e Pepe’s formal dining area.

Rossen Tonkov especially appreciated that his chosen image adhered to his golden rule—that a piece of art provide a minimum of seven different views in order to enrich a space.

Since the work was to be viewed from many different angles and distances this image had the best chance to provide different framed compositions between the columns, walls and archways,” said Tonkov. “The portion of fresco that is visible from a sitting or standing perspective had to inspire a wish to see more and explore the rest of the restaurant and its artwork.”

In preparation for traveling to Marco Island, Fla. to paint the fresco, Tonkov many weeks researching materials and experimenting with paints that are different from the European technology he had worked with in the past.

He employed the method of painting directly onto the plastered wall, as opposed to the traditional method of painting with oils directly onto a canvas, which is then applied to the wall.

The base of the classic “dry” fresco employes a layer of lime with sand and an adhesive layer over it. Then tempura paint is used to create the painting on top of this layer. It does not crack, says Tonkov, but he was challenged to make the painting appear that it had cracked over time.

“At Sale e Pepe we had to create a 500-year-old fresco, so I had to figure out how to make it last yet create the crackling and aged effect,” said Tonkov.

“Works of art are intended for a particular spot and their impact upon the architecture is significant,” says Tonkov. “I hope we have achieved this intention with this particular fresco in Sale e Pepe.”

Tonkov also was responsible for the dramatic collage of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s paintings that hangs above the bar in Toulouse™, a Belle Époque bar and lounge resembling turn-of-the-century Paris, also located at the Marco Beach Ocean Resort. Tonkov’s large oil reproduction combines seven of Toulouse-Lautrec’s paintings of the famous Moulin Rouge. Guests of Sale e Pepe enter and depart the restaurant through the wood paneled lounge, often stopping to enjoy an aperitif or after-dinner cognac, brandy, or liqueur, while enjoying the gaiety of the painting.

Rossen Tonkov

Tonkov graduated from the Academy for Fine Arts in Sofia, Bulgaria with a Masters in Fine Arts in 1987. His major was called “Monumental Painting” or large scale painting of frescoes, mosaics, and murals, where he learned about the relationship between the artist work and the architecture.

“I have worked in Bulgaria and Europe and have works in various public and residential buildings, including Wentworth Gallery and Chrysalis Gallery in New York,” he said. “I have had exhibitions in Holland, Spain and other countries in Western Europe. I have paintings in private collections in

Bulgaria, Holland, Germany, Spain, and the U.S. I work in watercolor, oil, pastel, tempera, and the traditional dry and wet fresco techniques."

Inspired by artists Domenikos Theotocopoulos, known as "El Greco," and Mexican mural artists Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Tonkov has some works in Bulgaria which are done in a layered plaster technique, indoor and outdoor mosaics, and low relief plastic mosaics with hand-painted ceramic elements.

He currently is working on several decorative painting projects in Orlando and Naples, creating faux finishes, frescoes, decorative vignettes, arabesques, and friezes, or "framed" paintings.

Sale e Pepe and Toulouse are located at 480 South Collier Boulevard, directly behind Marco Beach Ocean Resort in the Beach Pavilion. Complimentary valet parking is available. Dinner is served daily in the formal dining room from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Ties and jackets are required. For more information or reservations, call (239) 393-1600.