

Firenze is proof that the restaurant scene is well-fed

By Steve Cuozzo

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Too many maudlin stories make it sound as though every restaurant in town is closing for one reason or another — usually a supposedly greedy landlord.

The many more happy endings somehow get less media attention.

Here's one such win-win result.

The Upper East Side's popular northern Italian restaurant Firenze has quickly found a new home a block away from its original location, which was destroyed in a February fire.

Firenze is reopening at 1555 Second Ave. between East 80th and 81st streets, steps from 1594 Second Ave. where it had been since 1981.

The new, 15-year lease is for 1,400 square feet on the ground floor and 900 feet in the basement. The asking rent was \$20,000 a month — quite reasonable on a resurgent uptown avenue with a new Q train station a few blocks away.



425 Park Ave.
DBOX

Eastern Consolidated represented both sides — principal James Famularo for the building owner and Jeff Geoghegan for Firenze owner Emanuele Caisaguano.

Geoghegan recalled, “I walked out of the charred structure and Emanuele told me he needed a new location yesterday. We had a signed deal within four weeks.”

Firenze “has such a loyal following that Emanuele was taking down reservations on his cell phone during the lease signing,” Famularo said.

Just as interesting is why Firenze’s new space was available. The building at 1555 Second Ave. was long home to pricey Sistina, which owner Giuseppe Bruno last year moved to a much larger space at 24 E. 81st St. — the former home to American bistro Crown.

The merry-go-round reflects what anyone with eyes and an appetite knows: New York City’s restaurant scene remains vibrant and thriving despite admittedly high rents and soaring labor costs.

Harlem’s gentrification presses relentlessly on.

Just a few blocks west of where Mikhail Baryshnikov just bought a condo apartment, a young sommelier plans to open Nez Bar, a wine bar offering vintages inspired by her love of perfume.

Neighborhood resident Suzanne Grinberg operates a Nez Bar blog that relates scents to vino. She and a partner purchased the 1,205-square-foot, corner retail condo at 411 Manhattan Ave. at 117th Street for \$600,000.

The deal was brokered for Grinberg and for the partnership that owned the space by Faith Hope Consolo and her Douglas Elliman retail team including Arthur Maglio.

Ever-quotable Consolo said the “fragrance obsessed” somms have “transformed their philosophy of multisensory storytelling — using visual imagery, prose and poetry to evoke emotions created by scent — into a fine wine collection unmatched anywhere in the neighborhood.”

Nez Bar is expected to open by late summer.

These are champagne days for L&L Holding Co., the development firm founded by David W. Levinson.

L&L’s 425 Park Ave. just scored a coveted commendation for its Foster + Partners design from MIPIM Architectural Review, an international judging body that cited the building in its 2017 Future Projects Awards.

Meanwhile, curtain-wall glass has started to appear on L&L’s 390 Madison Ave., another all-new office tower that’s being built on the bones of an obsolete older one. Both projects are expected to be finished in 2018.

And, the great restaurant Nobu is scheduled to open (for lunch at first) on April 10 at L&L’s 195 Broadway at Fulton Street, in a larger space than it had in Tribeca.