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Italian Cuisine

## Alimento Opens Tonight: Zach Pollack on His Menu, the Booze and Charging For Water

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Anne Fishbein

Zach Pollack

Alimento, the new restaurant from chef Zack Pollack, opens tonight in Silver Lake.

Pollack is best known as one part of the two-man chef team behind **Sotto**, the Pico Boulevard Southern Italian restaurant that serves some of the city's best Italian food. Pollack and co-chef Steve Samson opened Sotto in 2011 in partnership with restaurateur Bill Chait. While Pollack is still very much a part of Sotto, he's currently focusing about 110% of his energy on his new project.

Pollack spent 12 days traveling around northern Italy recently doing research for Alimento, and found a lot of inspiration from the more Germanic flavors found in the regions of Italy near the border. "It's kind of like a little world between worlds," he says. But Alimento won't be a straightforward homage to any particular region of Italy — it will be an expression of Pollack as a chef. The short menu focuses on strong-flavored smaller plates (lamb belly, mackerel conserva), pastas and a couple of platters (whole fish, huge hunks of pork shank). Brunch will be coming on weekends in four to six weeks.

We spoke to a very sleep-deprived Pollack about the neighborhood, the menu and what's sure to become a controversial charge for water.

*Squid Ink: How is Alimento different from Sotto?*

*Zach Pollack:* Sotto is very fervently Southern Italian. Not necessarily explicitly authentic but definitely deeply inspired by Southern Italy. We don't use Parmigiano-Reggiano, we don't use balsamic vinegar, we use very little butter. So even if we're not transplanting dishes from a menu in Palermo to Pico Boulevard, there's a lot of inspiration there.

Alimento is still Italian through and through, but I want it to be a more fun place; I want it to be a place that doesn't take itself too seriously, even though we take the food in the back very seriously. There's a bit of lightheartedness that will reach the guest, a sense of humor. There are a number of dishes that you would certainly never find in Italy, that just have Italian ingredients reflected through a Southern Californian lens.

*SI: Can you talk a bit about the menu? What are you excited about?*

ZP: The menu is pretty small. It'll change very frequently. The restaurant itself is super small — the interior is less than 1,300 square feet — so it's a nicely sized one-bedroom apartment, basically. I have no walk-in refrigerator, and storage in general is a situation. So that's going to dictate, kind of, the size of the menu. We can't order 50 pounds of onions at a time.

So the menu will change frequently. As far as the style of it, for instance, I have an item on the menu called "pig in a blanket," and it's made with a braised mortadella, a fermented turnip from Friuli called *brovada*, some mustard seeds and spelt pastry — so all of those things are Italian through and through but it comes across as surprising and accessible at the same time. We'll have a lot of Italian ingredients, but it definitely isn't something you'd find on the streets of Rome.

SI: *Why did you choose Silver Lake?*

ZP: I've been looking in Silver Lake and the Eastside in general for years, since before we opened Sotto. Steve [Samson] and I were looking on Hillhurst [Avenue in Los Feliz], we were looking all over around here for a space. And then we met Bill [Chait] and that opportunity came about, and it was a good one. But opening here has always been something I want to do. I grew up on the Westside, but after college a group of my friends moved to a big house in Echo Park, so I spent some time over here.

And I just noticed that — it's not that there isn't good food on this side, there's definitely some good ethnic places, but as far as other food goes, I think there's a good market for it. I think people on this side of town really appreciate good food. And there's also a bit of a Bay Area feel. Not only do people appreciate good food but they're a little more open to trying new things. In South Beverly Hills, we've developed a loyal following of people who get the food we're doing at Sotto. But that definitely didn't happen overnight. There were a lot of people who didn't understand what we were doing and didn't come back.

SI: *Tell me about the booze.*

ZP: I have a beer and wine license. It's going to be a pretty concise list; we're opening with about 25 to 30 labels. It will grow a bit, but storage is an issue with wine as well. In the same spirit of not being strictly Italian, it's a largely Italian list. We have a few Californian wines, and we have a few wines from over the Italian border. We have a Gruner on tap from Austria. We have a couple of Slovenian wines. There are one or two French wines. My wine guy is Ryan Wenger. He's been with the guys at the Hart & the Hunter since it was a pop-up.

SI: *How many seats does the restaurant have?*

ZP: Once we open the patio — which is the sidewalk, to be clear — we'll have about 55 seats. Inside it's just a hair over 40, 42 to 44. The patio is not going to happen tomorrow. I have to get the planters that come up yea high that delineate what's restaurant and what's public. I'd like to roll that out in, maximum two weeks. It's on my to-do list. It's a long to-do list.

SI: *Anything else you think people should know?*

ZP: I think there's a federal mandate to deactivate all the open-air reservoirs, and so there's been a lot of talk about what's going to happen to the Silver Lake Reservoir [which sits just a block from the restaurant]. You may or may not have heard of **the 'hipster beach.'** There's an organization called the Silver Lake Reservoir Conservancy, which has been responsible for putting in the meadow and the jogging track.

We'll be charging for all water — we're charging \$2 for unlimited water, and we'll be donating half of that to the Conservancy. It will only amount to a small amount of the ultimate undertaking, whatever they decide to do. But we thought it would be nice to give back to the neighborhood.

SI: *You're going to get killed on Yelp for that \$2 charge, you know that right?*

ZP: You think?

SI: *Yeah.*

ZP: For \$2. For unlimited water?

SI: *Yeah. People are crazy.*

ZP: I gotta say, my Yelp skin is pretty thick.

Alimento will be open six days a week, 5:30 to 10 p.m. Sunday and Tuesday through Thursday; 5:30 to midnight Friday and Saturday.

**Alimento:** 1710 Silver Lake Blvd., Silver Lake; 323-928-2888 [www.alimentola.com](http://www.alimentola.com).

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