

Daily Breeze

How the acclaimed new-generation Trani chef aims to breathe life into historic waterfront spot



Jim Trani, left, and his son, Dustin, stand in the future site of their newest restaurant at the port in San Pedro on Thursday, Sep. 19, 2019. Their new seafood restaurant will be in the building which housed the immigration offices nearly 100 years ago and most recently it was Canetti's restaurant which closed in 2010. (Photo by Scott Varley, Daily Breeze/SCNG)

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PUBLISHED: September 20, 2019 at 6:14 pm | UPDATED: September 21, 2019 at 5:41 pm

One hundred years ago, the building on San Pedro's waterfront served as Los Angeles' Immigration Station, processing throngs of Japanese and other Pacific Rim newcomers arriving by boat to the United States.

By the 1950s, it was home to one of the town's most beloved and eclectic diner hangouts, [Canetti's Seafood Grotto](#). Canetti's closed in 2010.

And now, the 1918 structure that still stands near 22nd and Miner streets, amid some of the port's oldest warehouses and colorful fishing slips, is on the brink of a new destiny.

[Dustin Trani](#), the acclaimed fourth-generation chef to come from one of [San Pedro's best-known Italian restaurateur families](#), plans to bring Trani's Dockside Station to the historic site.

Trani, the executive chef at family-owned J. Trani's Risortante on Ninth Street near Grand Avenue, had been looking for a sister restaurant site when the property was made available for lease by the Port of Los Angeles.

Just steps from San Pedro's wholesale fresh fish market and with a view of the Vincent Thomas Bridge, the location was the perfect catch, said Trani, who had been scouting sites in Belmont Shore and other Long Beach coastal areas. Trani, named by critic Sophie Gayot as one of her "Top 5 Rising Star Chefs" in the United States in 2013, is pursuing the project in partnership with his father, Jim Trani.

The story of the building itself, Dustin Trani said, provided an easy sell. Their partners in the venture also include contractor Jack Logrande, Willy Carranza and Bill Albano.

"This will definitely draw people from Los Angeles" and beyond, the chef said of the planned upscale, casual restaurant that will serve coastal Italian and local, sustainable seafood entrees.

Envision an open-hearth kitchen, wood-burning fireplace, a raw bar with fresh fish on ice, oyster-laden 4 p.m. happy hours, and fresh-caught fish from the wholesale market every day.

With seating for 150 and outdoor patios in front and behind the restaurant, menu service will include breakfast, lunch and dinner, and later closings on weekends with live entertainment.

The decor will feature historic touches such as subway tiles and wall art along with a nautical- and industrial-themed look.

Among unique local touches will be historic photos of the building in its early days and the salvaged curved bar from [TC's Cocktails](#) at Gaffey and Ninth streets, a favorite neighborhood bar that closed in 2017. Adding to the collection on loan also will be a 100-year-old glass-and-metal table that once sat in San Pedro's Bank of Italy and, if it can be arranged, the original Canetti's neon sign that now sits in the Los Angeles Maritime Museum as part of a Canetti's exhibit. That's probably unlikely as the sign was specifically donated to the museum by the Canetti family.

Restaurant dynasty

The Trani family has become synonymous with Italian feasts in San Pedro ever since the family patriarch, Filippo, opened the first restaurant in 1925. He arrived in the U.S. at Ellis Island on Aug. 25, 1913, with \$20 in his pocket. A native of the island of Ischia, off the central coast of Italy, Filippo was 18 years old when he came to San Pedro. After years of farming and fishing, he opened the Majestic Cafe in 1925.

Fourth-generation Dustin Trani, who grew up hanging around the family restaurant, was formerly the executive chef of Doma Restaurant in Beverly Hills.

The port issued a request for proposals for the former immigration-Canetti's building in 2018 and was open to a variety of uses, including office space. The Jankovich Co. has leased the top-floor office space, but Dockside Station was selected for the lease of 4,500 square feet on the ground floor, a larger space than Canetti's had. The lease is for 20 years.

The port currently is going through the process for development of what is a historic building and the Trani family hopes to have the permits from the port and city in hand by the end of this year. That would mean possibly a late-2020 opening, in the best-case scenario. Interior construction is expected to cost \$1.2 million and take about seven or eight months.

"We're excited about having Trani's, which is a well-known brand and an iconic establishment," said Tony Gioiello, deputy executive director of development for the port.

The location also fills in another piece of the puzzle for port waterfront development as it is near what will become the south end of the San Pedro Public Market, the Cabrillo Way Marina, Crafted at the Port of Los Angeles and AltaSea.



The owners of J Trani's Ristorante will open a new restaurant on the bottom floor of this historic building at the port in San Pedro by the end of 2020. Their new seafood restaurant will be in this building which housed the immigration offices nearly 100 years ago and most recently it was Canetti's restaurant which closed in 2010. (Photo by Scott Varley, Daily Breeze/SCNG)