

# la dolce vita

CHEF DAVID ROCCO CELEBRATES SUMMER ITALIAN STYLE, WITH A FESTIVE DINNER PARTY AT HOME IN SAG HARBOR. BY LEIGH CRANDALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC STRIFFLER



Guests toast during David Rocco's four-course dinner.

It was love at first sight when David Rocco discovered his villa in Sag Harbor. "There's a rustic tranquility about it," he says about the home. "It's transporting—you feel like you're in Tuscany." Fitting for the Italian chef, who has risen to international fame traveling through the Tuscan countryside in search of authentic Italian dishes on the Cooking Channel's *David Rocco's Dolce Vita* and via cookbooks including *Made In Italy*.

Recently Rocco hosted several close friends for an evening that began with bocce on the lawn. "Games are a fun way to break the ice," he says. "And it's a great way to have your Prosecco." While playing, guests sipped on Sparkling Portofino cocktails of pear nectar and Prosecco by Ruffino (for which Rocco is a spokesperson). Then in the garden Rocco served *aperitivo*, including tuna balls with a balsamic sauce, rosemary, and sesame seeds; rolled *bresaola*, dried beef with ricotta and arugula; as well as crostino topped with mixed mushrooms, thyme, and cream. For summer dinner parties, Rocco prefers, "simple food and a casual pace that kind of lingers," he says.

As dusk settled, guests moved inside for a four-course dinner paired with Ruffino wine, beginning with a tomato melon salad. "The fruit and the greens have a nice, sweet taste that pairs wonderfully with the crispness of Pinot Grigio," he says. And, it's a great choice for busy hosts since it can be made in advance and then placed over a bed of arugula when it's time to serve.

For the next course (beet risotto with truffle oil), Rocco headed to the kitchen joined by several curious guests, who were eager to see the process behind the preparation. "In Italy, they will hang you in the piazza if you pre-make pasta and then heat it up," he jokes. But, having guests join you in the kitchen if you plan to make something fresh, "is in keeping with the spirit of cooking and drinking together," Rocco says. "This risotto is so lovely because of the jewel color of the beets, and it's neat when people can see it come to life."

Beef tenderloin in a red wine reduction followed, along with broccoli rabe with toasted pine nuts and raisins. In the background, music from Italian artists like Pino Daniele played, as well as upbeat tunes from the 1960s

*Having guests join you in the kitchen "is in keeping with the spirit of cooking and drinking together."*—DAVID ROCCO

including an Italian rendition of "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," a hit with the international guest list. "It was like the United Nations," Rocco jokes about dinner. "We had such an eclectic group from all over the world. There were friends from France, Australia, Great Britain, Sweden—and Nebraska! It made for an interesting night."

Dessert was "Drunken Peaches," fresh peaches first blanched and sprinkled with a mix of star anise, cinnamon, and cardamom, then simmered in red wine and topped with freshly made whipped cream and lemon zest. By dessert, "everyone was changing seats, which is the sign of a fun evening," Rocco says. "Everyone came together and was friends. And that's *dolce vita*—it's a state of mind. A genuine love for life." **H**

See more photos and recipes from David Rocco's party at [hamptons-magazine.com](http://hamptons-magazine.com).

## INSIGHT

**Rocco's favorite Italian market:** Cavaniola's Gourmet for its cheese, vinegars, cured meats, and flours for fresh pasta. 89B Division St., Sag Harbor, 725-0095; [cavaniola.com](http://cavaniola.com)

**For produce:** Sag Harbor Farmers' Market—"the local, fresh ingredients here bring my recipes to life." Bay St., Sag Harbor; [sagharborfarmersmarket.org](http://sagharborfarmersmarket.org)

**Best local Italian:** Tutto Il Giorno, 6 Bay St., Sag Harbor, 725-7009; 56 Nugent St., Southampton, 377-3611

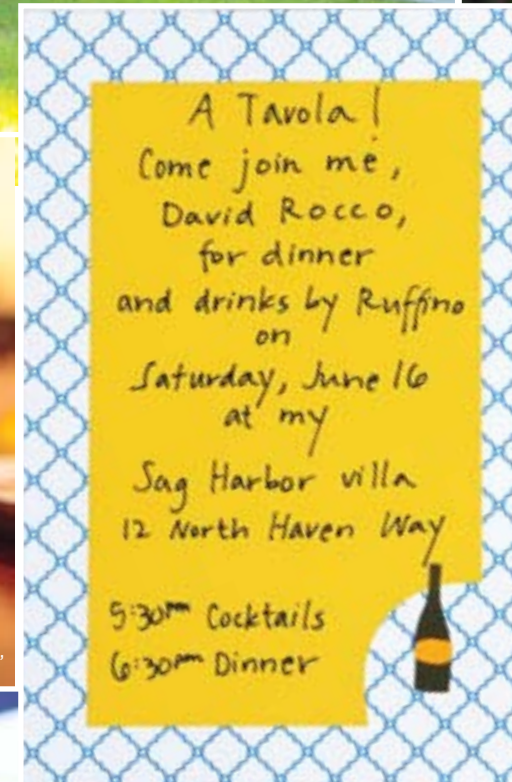
**Go-to wine for parties:** Ruffino, at Zabi's Wines & Spirits, 74 County Road, 39A, Southampton, 287-7171; [zabiswines.com](http://zabiswines.com)



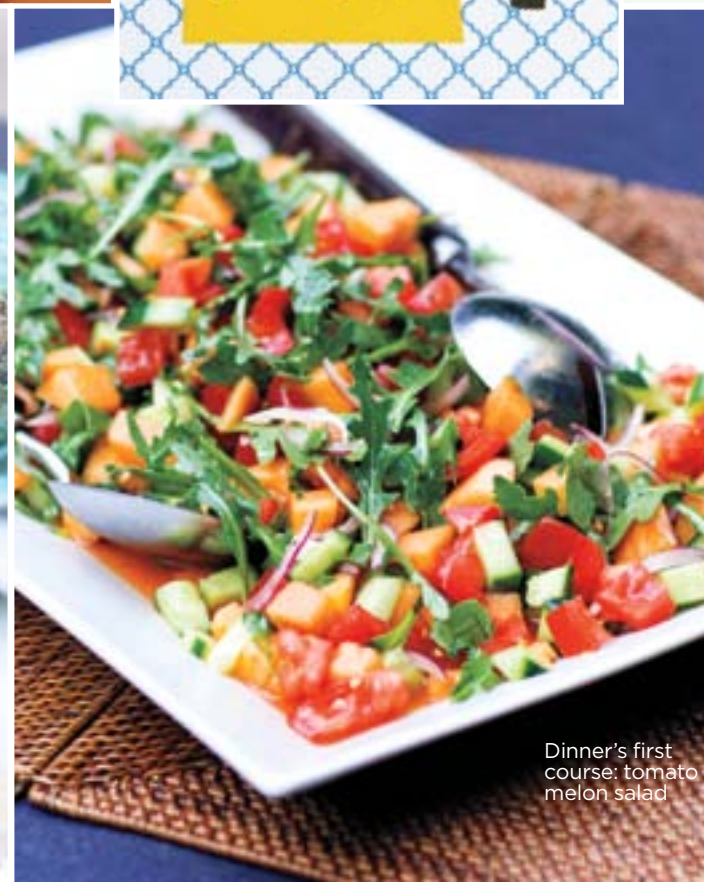
Guests enjoyed a pre-dinner game of bocce.



Dessert of "Drunken Peaches"



Rocco's tuna ball appetizer with a balsamic sauce, rosemary, and sesame seeds



Dinner's first course: tomato melon salad



David Rocco hand-rolls bresaola appetizers.



Prosecco and orange zests for the Sparkling Portofino cocktails