

CAVIAR AND COMPASSION

Max Tucci opens up about growing up in
America's First Family of Fine Dining,
philanthropy and finding his own life path.

By: Gina Samarotto

In New York in 1929, at the start of the Great Depression and with Prohibition already in full swing, a young man from Italy made the risky decision to venture into the restaurant business. The young man was Oscar Tucci, the restaurant was Delmonico's and what happened next would change the course of fine dining in Manhattan.

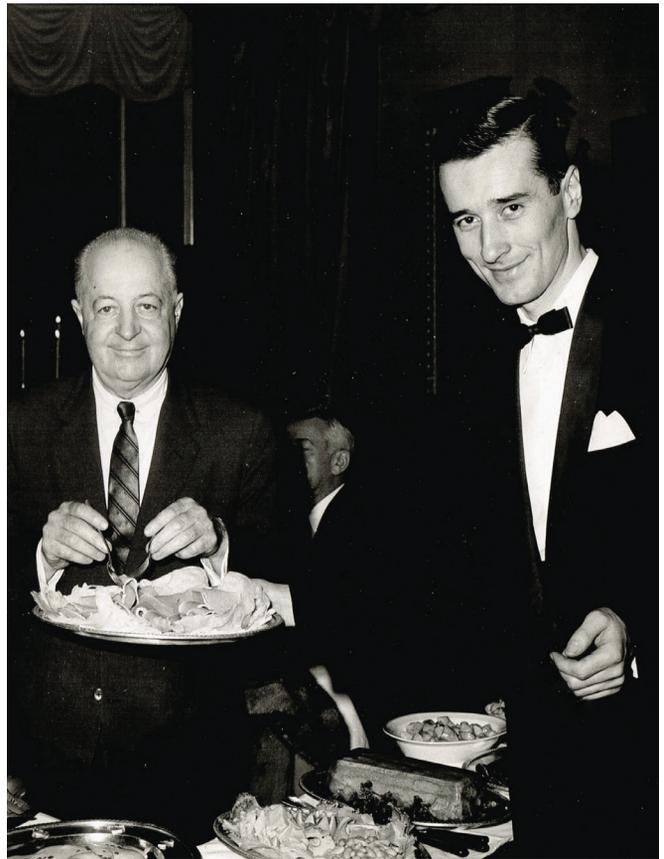
"My grandfather had a talent for drawing people to him and drawing the glitterati to Delmonico's." Oscar Maximillian Mario Carlo Julius Tucci - better known as Max - says over lunch in Greenwich. The thirty-something year old grandson of the iconic restaurateur, it's clear that this younger Tucci possesses the same brand of charm and energy that made his grandfather so appealingly

charismatic. Gypsy Rose Lee, Lana Turner, Eva Gabor and Red Buttons were just some of the familiar faces often found frequenting the famous dining room. "Delmonico's was legendary. It was the place to be."

So what was it like for Max to grow up in one of the most famous and revered dining rooms in restaurant history? "I loved being there," Max reminisces. "My sister Nicoletta and I would raid the pastry kitchen, swipe these delectable desserts off the trays and then lock ourselves in the office to devour them. My grandparents and parents were at the center of so much, they knew everyone and the restaurant was a magical place. But no matter how successful the business was, our family always came first."







*OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Delmonico's in the New York's gilded age,
Delmonico's during the shooting of the 1969
film, The April Fools starring Catherine
Deneuve and Jack Lemmon, and Eva Gabor
and guests dine at Delmonico's*

*ABOVE FROM LEFT:
Max Tucci's father, Mario Tucci (l) and
grandparents, Oscar and Sesta Tucci and
Oscar Tucci with Sirio Maccioni in Sirio's
pre-Le Cirque days.*

Growing up, Max spent his childhood traveling between the family's homes in the US and Florence, Italy. Despite the luxurious lifestyle though, he was well aware that with privilege comes responsibility. "Way before organizations like Second Harvest started, my father would open Delmonico's to help feed the homeless. When I was a kid I had a friend who was terminally ill. My mother and I would visit him in the hospital and it was so bleak, so uncomfortable. That prompted us to want to help and that help ultimately resulted in the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center."

While Oscar and Max's father, Mario, may be gone the family penchant for giving is alive and well. Max is a dedicated philanthropist who uses his expansive wealth of connections and resources to help others. He's a sought after patron, a prominent fixture at fundraisers. "I don't do it for karma or recognition. I do it because I can. I do it because my family has always done it and it's part of my own life path. And I do it because when I help make a difference in a life - whether it's human or animal - it makes me feel incredible and it confirms my purpose and passion as a humanitarian. I go to bed with a smile on a face and I can't wait to get up and do it again."

