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Sandra Special Pizza, (thin crust pizza with chopped plum tomatoes, garlic, basil, fresh mozzarella and a touch of olive oil). John Meore/The Journal News

The new location of Modern Restaurant & Lounge isn't too far from the old one: just a few blocks away, in fact. But its new look? That is light years away.

A former Ford dealership where cars were built in the basement, then displayed in the showroom upstairs, is now the reincarnation of one of New Rochelle's favorite pizzerias: a gleaming new eatery with massive windows, high ceilings, and a stylish bar area complete with a see-through wine cellar.

"Initially, we thought it was too enormous for our needs," says one of the owners, Anthony Russo. "But the more we thought about it, the more we realized it suited what we were looking for exactly."

But there's one thing owners Russo and his partner, Sebastian Aliberti, want you to know about the sweeping new space: The menu and the prices are the same as at the old one.

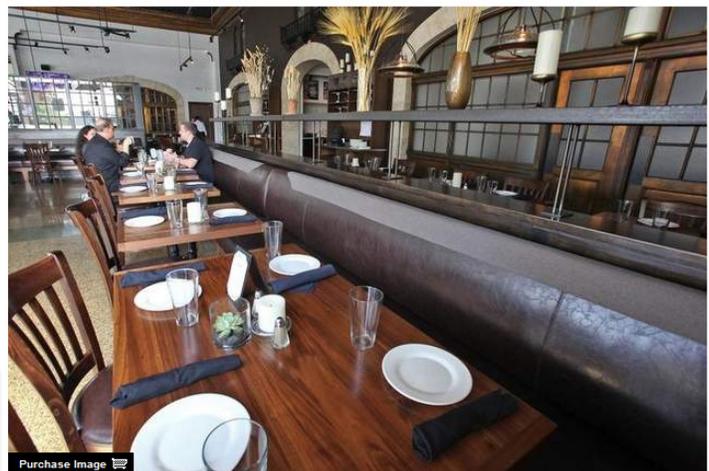
The two cousins even had a brick oven built in the kitchen to mimic the one from their old location, so the pizza would taste identical.

It's all about tradition at Modern, which has had a foothold in New Rochelle since 1987, and has been family-owned for more than 20 years. Though the restaurant may be more sophisticated and glamorous than its previous pizzeria ambiance, the service and commitment to customers is as strong as ever.

Aside from the oversized dining room, there is a party room in the back which accommodates 80, and has its own entrance. There is also an area to the left of the main entrance, which is used either as a cocktail lounge accompaniment to the 20-seat bar, or as a more intimate party room for up to 30. For those getting their orders to go, there is a separate entrance on Westchester Place.

According to Russo, Modern had evolved over the years to more of a full-service restaurant, yet because of its small size, was limited.

"Delivery drivers had to traipse through the dining room to pick up pizza orders and various members of the staff had to constantly open the door to the basement, which was smack dab in the middle of everything, in order to stock up on fresh vegetables or paper goods," Russo said. "Moving to a larger venue was something we had been thinking about for some time."



The dining room at Modern Restaurant and Lounge in New Rochelle. / John Meore/The Journal News