





Steve Samson Zach Pollack Chef/owners, Sotto Los Angeles, California sottorestaurant.com



Although they both initially pursued other careers, immersive experiences in Italy set the course of Chefs Samson and Pollack inevitably toward the kitchen. **Steve Samson** grew up spending summers in Italy with his Bolognese relatives, cooking alongside his grandmother and mother. He had planned to be a doctor, but eventually left Columbia University's premed program to enroll in New York's Institute of Culinary Education. He emerged a Blue Ribbon graduate and started his professional cooking career in New York and Maine. Samson then worked his way through Italy with a series of stages at Michelin-starred restaurants, including Dal Pescatore, Il Duomo, Torre del Saraceno, Quattro Passi, and Il Cascinale Nuovo. When he returned to the States, he began working with Chef Piero Selvaggio, whom he helped to open the Las Vegas outpost of Valentino, and for whom he headed up the original in Santa Monica.

Zach Pollack, on the other hand, had his first taste of Italy on a semester abroad in Florence. The Brown architecture graduate's first stint in the kitchen was as an intern at Neal Fraser's Grace, where he met Samson. There they bonded over their love of Italian food. Pollack returned to Italy and trained at two-Michelin–starred Ristorante Ambasicata and Verona's tiny Ristorante Michelangelo. Like Samson, he also staged at Sicily's Il Duomo.

The two reunited at David Myers' Sona before launching Pizzeria Ortica, an award-winning restaurant in Orange County. Their latest venture, Sotto, which is focused is on the cuisine of Southern Italy, has garnered much critical acclaim, including Best New Restaurant and Chefs of the Year nods from *Los Angeles Magazine* in 2011; Best Pizza (2012) and Best Meatball (2011) in Los Angeles, *LA Weekly*; recognition as one of *Esquire's* 'Best New Restaurants in America 2011'; *Angeleno's* 'Best New Dish' (Porcetto), also in 2011; and *Star Chef's* 'Southern California Rising Stars' chef award. In 2012, Pollack was named one of *Forbes*' 30 Under 30 in the Food & Wine category. *****

Panelle

SERVES 8 TO 12 (MAKES 100 STRIPS)

Panelle are a traditional Sicilian street snack. At Palermo's Antica Focacceria di San Francesco, these chickpea fritters are simply served in a sesame seed bun with shredded caciocavallo cheese. The sandwich is a perfect accompaniment to a stroll through La Vucciria, the city's colorful open-air market.

500 g (17.64 oz.) finely ground chickpea flour*

20 g (about 5 tsp.) salt 1 tbsp. fresh Italian parsley, chopped Vegetable oil, for frying 1 lemon Fresh-ground pepper to taste Grated caciocavallo cheese (or similar grating cheese)

1. Sift chickpea flour into a bowl, then add salt. Add 1.75 liters (59 fl. oz.) water to bowl, whisking slowly to avoid forming lumps. Whisk until homogenous. Pour batter into a saucepan and whisk over medium-high heat until mixture begins to thicken.

2. Lower heat to medium-low, add parsley, and continue whisking constantly until batter starts to pull from side of pan and holds together on whisk without dripping. Cooking process should take about 10 minutes.

3. Pour cooked batter onto a flat working surface (marble or stainless steel works best). Using an offset spatula, spread thinly and evenly to approximately ½-in. thick. Allow to cool at least 15 minutes. Cut into rectangular strips, approximately 1-in. by 3-in.

4. Heat oil to 375° in a large, deep frying pan. Working in batches, add strips to oil and fry until crisp and puffy, approximately 3 to 4 minutes. Be careful not to overcrowd your pan.

5. Drain fried panelle strips on paper towellined sheet pans. Season with salt, a squeeze of lemon, and freshly cracked black pepper.

6. Arrange panelle on a platter and grate caciocavallo on top. Serve immediately. *****

* Find chickpea flour and caciocavallo cheese at Italian specialty markets.

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