



FABIO VIVIANI



PHOTO: LINDA M. BARRETT

Fabio Viviani's Private Estate Dinner Experience offers its members the world's finest spirits, wines, and foods in an intimate setting at his Barrington estate. Learn more at [privateestatediningexperience.com](http://privateestatediningexperience.com).

# *Fabulous Fabio*

MEET AMERICA'S MOST DYNAMIC HOSPITALITY DEVELOPER, CELEBRITY CHEF, RESTAURATEUR, BUSINESS COACH, FRANCHISOR, AND DEVOTED FAMILY MAN

*Written by Lisa Stamos*



Prime & Provisions offers a true steakhouse cuisine using a clean eating philosophy and clean ingredients. It is located at 222 North LaSalle Street in Chicago.

Running a successful restaurant is a theater of the unexpected, where things can go right, and anything can and does go wrong. There are unanticipated menu snafus, staffing problems, big personalities, and online customer complaints. Not to mention the need for a profit margin at the end of the day. Viviani calls it the “most unpredictable-predictable business in the world.”

In the foreword he wrote for his Chief Operating Officer Ken McGarrie’s book, “The Surprise Restaurant Manager,” Viviani tells it like it is: “...I’d like to make a point about what being a restaurateur feels like. With a company that encompasses over 50 hospitality concepts in nearly a dozen different states—from hotels to gaming facilities to standalone restaurants to bars and quick service, as well as fast casual and event venues—my team and I basically have our hands in anything and everything that has to do with people eating, drinking, lodging, and having fun. So now let’s chat for a second about what our business is really like. The best way I can describe this business is that it feels like a consistently unexpected sucker punch in the face.”

Nevertheless, and despite the challenges, he goes on to say that hospitality is a beautiful business. And Viviani is doing a beautiful job on his steadfast vision towards owning and running America’s largest privately held hospitality group. Fabio Viviani Hospitality Group currently operates 50 hospitality properties and will be at 60 by year’s end. His plan is to reach 1,000 properties by the end of this decade. And he is opening his first hospitality franchise,

JARS, which he believes will be the fastest-growing casual dessert concept that America has ever experienced.

## *Building a Hospitality Empire*

No one knows him better, or has worked with Fabio Viviani longer, than his chief operating officer, business partner, and “consigliere” Ken McGarrie. McGarrie is one of the top talents in the American culinary and hospitality world, and he’s shared his expertise and school-of-hard-knocks stories in “The Surprise Restaurant Manager,” a book he wrote to help people who start out as a bartender or cook, and suddenly find themselves in charge of the whole restaurant operation.

“Fabio is a hustler, he’s so passionate, and a risk-taker,” McGarrie said. “There is little he cannot do. He creates a positive work culture where people want to work for him. He treats his guests like they are in his home, and he even answers the hundreds of daily texts he receives from people.” According to McGarrie, there is no one more committed to his guests and growing community than the man he works for. “Fabio genuinely loves connecting with people.”

McGarrie explains that the company strategy pivoted during the pandemic. With restaurants hit the hardest, the costs of opening new properties with all the heavy upfront investments wasn’t as feasible. So, in addition to owning their existing properties outright, Fabio Viviani Hospitality



Bar Siena, a sibling to DineAmic Hospitality's River North eatery Siena Tavern, is located at Old Orchard Mall in Skokie and Chicago's West Loop Fulton Market. Lunch, dinner, late night, and weekend brunch fare showcases authentic Italian street foods and a variety of pizza.

Group expanded into a consulting and managing team for hospitality venues owned by others, leveraging their marketing and operations skills, as well as the firm's celebrity status. "For example, Hollywood Casino hired us to take over their eateries," McGarrie said. "We work with casino groups, Hyatt and Hilton hotels, and other large entities."

Opening nights reveal Viviani's caring character and hands-on approach. "It is entertaining to watch him," McGarrie said. "He goes from table to table and talks with everyone. And on one opening night occasion, when our open-tickets order system went down, Fabio stepped in and took orders from the servers, called them out loud to the chefs, and made sure orders were ready at the pick-station on time. He's a great chef and a true visionary."

## *Greatness Born of Necessity*

Most highly successful entrepreneurs start their journeys with nothing but a need, an idea, and a dream—and unending hard work and long hours. As Viviani says, "In the dictionary is the only place the word 'successful' comes before 'work.'"

The Viviani family—two parents, two grandparents, Fabio, and an "adopted brother" who was in need—shared a 600-square foot apartment in the projects of Florence, Italy, and lived off food stamps. Viviani's mother became ill when he was a boy, and to help alleviate a lack of money, he went to work at a local pastry shop at age 11. "There

was too much month at the end of the money," he said. He worked the midnight shift to early morning for seven years with no time off or vacations. He was working, going to school, and at 17, attended culinary training to acquire a license for the food business.

"I was not a good classroom student, as I learn better doing the work hands-on," Viviani said. "I told my teachers, 'Hey guys, this isn't working,' and they let me go through the process my way so I could get a license." The owner of the pastry shop opened a restaurant and invited Viviani to participate, and he accepted. That owner then opened a second one, and Viviani negotiated a piece of ownership.

After several years, Viviani sold the businesses which comprised several venues, and at 27, was able to buy his parents a home, fund their retirement needs, and head to America for a long-overdue vacation. He landed in Malibu, California, where he toured on bicycle and didn't know any English. He did know German, French, and Spanish from his schooling in Italy.

After his first and then second bikes were stolen, Viviani bought a car and teamed up with an Italian friend to open a restaurant. Compared to his venues in Italy, the American restaurants were making a fortune, and he knew he could run them more efficiently. This was his "ah-ha" moment. "They were not running them well, and still killing it financially."



*Bar Cicchetti bites & booze is nestled on the ground floor of New York City's Motto By Hilton in Chelsea and features Italian crowd favorites. The menu reflects seasonally inspired dishes including Fabio Viviani's takes on his favorite comfort food classics and craft beer and cocktails.*

## *A Clear Vision and Goals*

One of Viviani's top goals is taking care of his family, like he did in Italy as a boy. It's what inspires him. He met his wife, Ashley Jung, while on a consulting job in Chicago with wine importer Terlato. She grew up in Barrington and graduated from Barrington High School. Whereas he used to be more carefree, this family man is now more concerned with his legacy at home—and is not fueled by the celebrity status he has earned. Fame, he says, is fleeting and only useful to promote the work you are doing.

"Successful people create different habits," Viviani says. "You have to understand that without working, things don't just happen—but they do if you work very hard. Luck is relative to the amount of effort you put into things. The only luck out there is the lottery. I believe in doing the right things and helping that luck. And I don't believe that

circumstances define what you are going to do. They only define where you came from."

What holds together Fabio Viviani Hospitality Group is a people-centric and talented leader who attracts and keeps the right people. "I can teach you how to work, but I cannot teach you how to be a good person," he said. "Being a nice person is paramount to building anything. We can disagree at times and that is okay."

Viviani holds to his vision to own the largest privately held hospitality group in the country with 1,000 restaurant and other hospitality venues under management. Achieving that vision, he says, might require changes to his goals along the way. One thing is certain, though. He's going to need a lot of good people to help him get there.

*Learn more about Fabio Viviani's Private Estate Dinner Experience visit [privateestatediningexperience.com](http://privateestatediningexperience.com)  
To learn more about JARS franchise opportunities, visit [jarsbyfabioviviani.com](http://jarsbyfabioviviani.com).*



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## Fabio Viviani on Cooking

Fabio Viviani began cooking as a boy in Florence, Italy, where he grew up. His job at a local bakery was out of loyalty to his family and of sheer necessity. "I started working in a pastry shop at age 11, doing the shift from midnight to seven in the morning," Viviani said. "But I hated the business because I was only doing it to support my parents. My mom had serious health issues and we needed the money."

For seven years, Viviani worked nonstop at the shop with no time off or vacations. Today, he says he is not a fan of baking. He then attended culinary training to become licensed in Italy and opened and executed several successful food concepts in Florence. After his move to Los Angeles, Viviani opened several properties there and now today, has more than 50 across the United States.

So, what is his favorite food? "Pasta!" he says. For dinner, Viviani and Ashley, his wife, prefer something to cook in the oven, like pot roast or chicken. "Something easy to make," he says. We asked the uber-successful culinary star for a tip that everyday cooks could adopt at home.

"When you are cooking dry pasta, cook it for only half the time that the directions tell you. Then, even though the pasta will still be hard, finish cooking it in the sauce." And there you have it.



## INTRODUCING FABIO VIVIANI'S JARS

"You can quote me on this," Viviani said. "In five years, look back at this article and see if this was true." Twenty locations for his new JARS franchise have already been sold, and the first one, to be in Chicago's West Loop, hasn't even opened yet.

Viviani likes to create food concepts and venues that make people happy. His newest creation will do just that—both for the franchisee who becomes a JARS storeowner, and for the people eating up the desserts. "JARS will be the biggest, fastest-growing casual dessert concept that America has ever experienced," he said. With cake as the base ingredient, the desserts are elegantly layered into portable jars that will offer 10 base flavors on the menu, and a rotating selection from 100 of the most popular American cake and pie flavors such as Cheesecake, Mississippi Mud Pie, Strawberry Shortcake, and more.

"It's the lowest-cost business model, needs no kitchen, no hood, no major expertise, and we produce everything. Our franchisees just pack up the desserts and sell them," Viviani said. He says it's the perfect concept for someone who wants to be in the hospitality business, but doesn't want a high-maintenance lifestyle.

To learn more, visit [jarsbyfabioviviani.com](http://jarsbyfabioviviani.com).