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Da Vinci's Ristorante Tustin, California

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'As a matter of fact, it is now known that the Mona Lisa was actually modeled on a woman who was to become his first waitress!'

Ah, Da Vinci... inventor, military engineer, sculptor, illustrator, architect, scientist, restaurateur. Restaurateur? Yes, it was the Da Vinci no one knew about, but it was only a matter of time before Da Vinci would open a restaurant since food was so important to him. As a matter of fact, it is now known that the Mona Lisa was actually modeled on a woman who was to become his first waitress!(1) It's also patently clear by the subject matter of his paintings: *The Last Supper*, 1497; the *Proportions of the Human Figure*, 1490 (which was originally titled the *Proportions of the Human Waiter*); the restaurant in the background of *St. Jerome*, 1480; the restaurant in the foreground of the *Annunciation*, originally commissioned for Verrocchio, 1478; the background of the uncompleted, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1482; and the recently discovered sketch books, titled *Coghioneria: Sketches of a Frustrated Restaurateur*. In the sketch book, Da Vinci had designed over 236 different restaurants in hopes that some day he might have his own.

This all came to a head 8 April 1476 when Leonardo, then 24, and several others were denounced to the police for having "committed sodomy" with a 17-year old model named Jacopo Saltarelli. The anonymous accusation was found in tamburo outside the Palazzo Vecchio and read that Saltarelli "...consents to please those persons who request such wickedness of him" and that he had "served several dozen people." The assumption was that Saltarelli was a male prostitute and though the case came before the courts twice, it was dismissed on both occasions. But the truth was Leonardo and Saltarelli eventually became lovers!

In a recently published book titled *Lui gli ha fatto una bella pipa* (2) it is clear that they had remained lovers for decades and eventually moved to California where, Leonardo thought, homosexuality would be more tolerated. In 1516, a 40-year old Leonardo and a 33-year old Saltarelli, with some funding from Lorenzo di Pietro de' Medici, both sailed to California on board one of Colon's ships, the *La Quaglia* which was headed for the port of San Francisco. Unfortunately, their cartographer became confused and they ended at what is now known as Laguna Beach. What they discovered was a haven for homosexuals and they bought a bungalow there before making their way inland to Tustin where Leonardo fulfilled his desire of opening his own restaurant (and, eventually, a motel) due to the astute real estate savvy of Saltarelli who opened his own real estate agency there as well. But in June, 1518, Leonardo was recalled to Italy to plan the festival at Amboise for the wedding of Lorenzo di Pietro de' Medici and Madeleine de La Tour d'Auvergne. Though he had full intentions of returning to Tustin, that never happened. In January, 1519, he became sick and only a few

months later, he died. Hearing of Leonardo's death some months later, Saltarelli could not face living in Italy without Leonardo and remained in Tustin where he continued to own and operate all three businesses. As living testimony to both of them, the businesses remain to this day.

(1) *From Lasagne Magro to Mona Lisa: The Waitress Behind the Genius* Carlo Emilio Calvino. Milan: Edizioni Scola, 2002.

(2) *Lui gli ha fatto una bella pipa*. Luchresi Rizzarsi. Edizione Focaccia. Translated by Mark Axelrod as *The Saltarelli Diaries*. Tustin, CA: Saltarelli Press, 2003.