

No mas: Masa restaurant closing in Mercato



Masa is going out with a fiesta finale this week.

Its annual Cinco de Mayo party will be the last for the award-winning Mexican restaurant and lounge in Mercato.

“We’re having a Cinco de Mayo party all day long with music and dancing. We have a huge celebration every year,” said local restaurateur Richard D’Amico, co-owner of [D’Amico & Partners](#), a company that owns [Masa](#) and many other restaurants and catering operations in Naples and Minnesota.

But this May 5 will be last call for Masa and its spicy signature cocktail [Margarita de Diabolita](#). The popular North Naples restaurant will close after the last drink is downed Friday night.

“We had a five-year lease, and our lease term is expiring. We are not renewing,” D’Amico said. “We’re just sorry to see it go. We had some great years there.”

The contemporary Mexican restaurant had seen better seasons, though, since [it opened in November 2012](#). Sales were down this year, D’Amico said.

“Our sales are not what they were, but they’re not embarrassingly low,” he said. “It’s just not enough to make it work.”

While Masa’s sales dropped, profits were up at the other Naples restaurants owned and operated by D’Amico & Partners. D’Amico said sales were way up at The Continental and Fogg Café, slightly up at Campiello and Café & Bar Lurcat, and stable at D’Amico & Sons.

“This year was strange in a way that when I drove around town it doesn’t even feel like season. I can’t figure it out,” D’Amico said.

Masa follows a handful of other businesses that recently vacated the mixed-use development off U.S. 41 and Vanderbilt Beach Road. Mercato lost Rusty Bucket and Taps restaurant and lounges at the end of December. Vom Fass and the Wine Cellar specialty stores closed this spring.

A Mercato representative was not available for comment regarding the recent vacancies or its plans to fill them. The former space of Rusty Bucket Restaurant and Tavern between Bravo and The Counter is already under construction to prepare for an early fall opening of the first Florida location for the Ohio-based [Burntwood Tavern](#), another upscale dining concept.

A year before Masa opened in suite 7135 at 9123 Strada Place, [Pure Urban Oasis ceased operation](#) after a brief run in the same 5,400-square-foot space. The trendy restaurant/nightclub operated in the upscale center from April 2010 to December 2011.

In Masa’s case, parking issues in Mercato are mostly to blame for its recent turnover, D’Amico said. On-site parking garages and spaces fill with vehicles from patrons and employees of the center’s supermarket, cinema, retail shops, offices, residences and more than 15 eateries.

“It doesn’t have to do with what the rents are there,” he said. “It’s the parking issues and just overall conceptually from what everybody thought it was going to be and what it turned out to be. In my opinion, it’s not what it started out to be.”

Before Masa launched, D’Amico traveled extensively throughout Mexico with Patricia Quintana, a celebrity chef in Mexico, to create [the restaurant’s complex modern menu](#) of flavorful authentic dishes. But after proudly offering hard-core Mexican dishes such as Puerco Veracruzano, marinated pork shoulder steamed in a banana leaf, D’Amico said most Americans simply order tacos.

“I don’t know whether the rest of the menu is relevant,” he said.

D’Amico also focused attention to detail on Masa’s sophisticated décor, including its showpiece walls of live plants.

“That was a labor of love,” he said. “That’s one of the prettiest restaurants we ever did.”

The trendy Mexican eatery had a predecessor and counterpart also named Masa in downtown Minneapolis operated by D’Amico & Partners until its 10-year lease expired in October 2015.

While the company is making an effort to place Masa employees at its other Naples restaurants, D’Amico still has hope here for haute Mexican cuisine in a fine-dining setting.

“If we could find the spot in Naples, we’d look at launching another Masa,” D’Amico said. “I don’t know if we’d do it exactly the same.”

