

Issue Date: April 2012,

His Own Recipe

Chef Luers Serves it up At Enoteca Emilia

By Joy W. Kraft



Jeremy Luers, photo by Tom Uhlman

Cooking has always been on the front burner for Jeremy Luers, chef at the popular Enoteca Emilia Wine Bar and Restaurant in O'Bryonville. (Enoteca means wine repository or wine shop; Emilia is a region in northeast Italy.)

"When I was a kid my brothers made fun of me for watching all the food shows like 'Frugal Gourmet' instead of action shows," says Luers, 34. And though his mom "canned everything she could get her hands on . . . and tends to cook Southern" (think fried chicken with pan gray and corn, his favorite birthday dish) her pasta sauce was near the top of his list.

That lack of pretension in the kitchen and appreciation for casual, carefree food hit a chord with him when Margaret Ranalli, Enoteca Emilia 's owner, sought him out last May for her new restaurant spotlighting the Emilia Romagna area of Italy known for its emphasis on cured meats and "Parma" cheese.

And though Luers was trained in the precise ways of French preparation (when he worked with chef Gethin Thomas at a Fortune 500 company in Columbus, Ind. after graduation from The National Center for Hospitality Studies at Louisville's Sullivan University), he appreciates the casual nonchalance of an Italian kitchen.

"When it comes to preparing food, Italians seem to enjoy it more. There's no pretension. It's not like they are spending hours cutting everything a

certain identical way. It's a little more casual, rustic, a bit more carefree." A visit to Enoteca Emilia is much like that with a chatty, neighborhood atmosphere.

Ranalli and Luers found themselves a good fit last spring in the venture to spotlight mid-priced Italian food . "We both thought there was a big gap here for that," he says.

In creating the menu he brought experience from the kitchens of Boca, Rookwood and Teller's, and the celebrated Babbo's in New York City. And though Rookwood was his first "chef" position where he "took all the praise . . . and all the criticism as well," ideas for every dish at Enoteca Emilia started with him, though sous chef Rachel Roberts gets credit for the follow-through. The two have worked together since Boca.

Focus is on the cured meats and cheeses that make the Emilia region famous, all creatively presented in bar snacks, cheeses, artisanal pizzas, skewered meats and seafoods, pastas and desserts.

Food critics get especially weak-kneed over the "whipped lardo and nduja," (cured pork fatback and a spreadable salami ) but Luers has built in something for the less adventurous as well. Wine sippers can rely on meatball sliders made with red sauce, salsa verde and parmigiano reggiano or deviled eggs with trout, mortadella bread crumbs and salsa verde.

Everything has Luers' twist, even the bolognese which he says "has been done a million times. But here it has duck liver instead of chicken liver with pork and beef. I try to find what I enjoy and what relates to the restaurant." -