

# Enoteca Emilia (Review)

## O'Bryonville restaurant transports diners to Northern Italy

BY BILL HATFIELD • OCTOBER 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2011 • DINER  
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I was truly excited to try Enoteca Emilia. After all, I used to live in Bologna, which is the capital city of the Emilia Romagna region of Italy, and I have always lamented the lack of Northern Italian restaurants in our area. Enoteca Emilia's concept was enticing in that the owners were going to focus on small plates to encourage sharing, and feature cured meats and cheeses with sophisticated snacks, pizza, salads and pasta.

In Italy, an enoteca is a wine shop specializing in local wines that allows guests to sample a true variety of the offerings of the region. Enoteca Emilia offers a thoughtfully constructed, all-Italian wine list that is remarkable in its depth of choices, although I wish more wines were available by the glass than are currently offered in order for Enoteca Emilia to live up to its promise of being a true enoteca.



*Anna Bentley*

Enoteca Emilia is located on Madison Road in O'Bryonville in the space that for years was The Brickyard, and most recently Balboa's. The atmosphere is casual and welcoming with exposed brick walls, a large circular bar and well-executed lighting. The menu is exciting and unique and for the most part well executed.

The food wowed me from the first bite. There are so many tempting items on Chef Jeremy Luers' menu that I need to return to sample the Prosciutto di Parma, the Pecorina cheese and other cured meats and cheeses which are offered at three choices for \$15 or five for \$20. The bar snacks include Stuffed Figs (\$9), Deviled Eggs with smoked trout (\$7) and Cockles in spicy tomato broth (\$12). I did have the Fried Polenta (\$8), which consisted of two delicately fried rich and creamy polenta balls stuffed with fontina cheese and prosciutto, topped with a fresh tomato marinara. This dish is delicious and one of the best appetizers that I have ever had.

My dining companion chose the Asparagus Salad (\$10) which was a nice-sized portion of chilled asparagus spears with roasted garlic and an interesting creamy heirloom tomato vinaigrette. For his entrée he selected the Lasagne (\$17). This lasagne truly represented Emilia Romagna as its lamb ragu and Parmigiano reggiano cheese presented a comforting Northern Italian flavor profile that was enhanced with toasted mint breadcrumbs. I could imagine this dish being served in any of the finest restaurants in Bologna; it was that good.

Other pasta offerings include Squid Ink Spaghetti (\$15), Gnudi with brown butter, sage, hazelnuts and ricotta salata also \$15 and a tempting Black Pepper Pappardelle (\$17).

The only disappointing dish was Lamb Spiedini (\$13). Spiedini are skewers of meat and vegetables. I expect lamb to be cooked medium rare; my lamb was at best medium well and thus overcooked and

tough. In addition it was under-seasoned. However, the mint crema and fig balsamic reduction upon which the spiedini were served was excellent. Enoteca Emilia also offers Shrimp (\$14) or Chicken (\$12) spiedini which deserve to be tried on future visits.

As a side dish, I tried the Roasted Fingerling potatoes and sweet Cipolene Onions (\$5). The fingerlings were perfectly cooked and the onions were out-of-this-world good.

Enoteca Emilia also offers several thin crust artisanal pizzas highlighted by a traditional Margherita Pizza (\$12) and Pizza con Speck (\$14). Speck is a juniper flavored smoked ham that is not often found on menus and is well worth trying.

As much as we enjoyed our food, service issues seriously dampened our dining experience. When we arrived, the hostess was lackadaisical toward her duties. She offered no time expectation for a wait for a table, and she didn't escort us to a high-top table in the bar area but merely indifferently pointed the way to our destination. When our server arrived, he immediately irritated me by trying to up-sell us on sparkling water, and it took well over 10 minutes for him to return with our glasses of wine. It was such a long wait that my guest wished that I wasn't reviewing the restaurant so we could get up and leave. He left us waiting throughout the meal and was simply unpleasant. There is no need to expand on his faults, but suffice it to say that he negatively affected my perception of the restaurant.

Enough bitching! Enoteca Emilia is still in its infancy and it definitely has front-of-the-house staffing issues that need to be resolved. I spoke to owner Margaret Ranalli before this review went to press, and she assured me that she will address these problems so that service soon is as good as her food.

The menu is innovative, the preparation borders on excellence and the wine list is top notch. Enoteca should become a destination for all those looking for the best in Northern Italian cuisine.

Go: 2038 Madison Road, O'Bryonville

Call: 513-834-5775

Surf: No website, but menu and information on Facebook page

Hours: 4-11 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 4 p.m.-midnight Friday and Saturday and 4-10 p.m. Sunday

Entrée Prices: \$12-\$17

Red Meat Alternatives: Many

Accessibility: Ramp Entrance