



Enoteca Emilia: Pizza, pasta are primo!

10:38 am, Sep 30, 2011 | Written by pcampbell

Anyone who wants to open an Italian restaurant and serve something new doesn't have to invent dishes. All that is necessary is to go back to the source. Once we knew meatballs and spaghetti. Then we learned about risotto, then polenta. Spumoni gave way to gelato and Chianti to Montepulciano. There seems to be no end to "new" Italian dishes that are, in fact, an established part of Italian cuisine.



The newest old Italian import is cured meats. There's always been salami, and prosciutto has caught on. But there is more salume, or Italian charcuterie, yet to discover. At Enoteca Emilia in O'Bryonville, an Italian cured-meat plate starts off a menu of small plates designed around a 100 percent Italian wine list. Chef Jeremy Luers finds the surprise and delight in Italian classics. This is a welcome new place to go, seven nights a week, for a glass of wine and a snack or for a dinner made up of snacks, pizza and pasta.

Enoteca occupies a historic building in O'Bryonville that has been several restaurants, most recently Balboa's. The floors are battered hardwood, the walls exposed brick, and a fireplace looks ancient. But a re-do that includes marble countertops, oversized poppy print wallpaper and modern light fixtures gives it a clean, trendy look.

Interestingly, some of the best Italian salume is made in the U.S. Don't talk while you eat the prosciutto rosso from Iowa-based La Quercia. Just feel the flavor on your tongue, with its slight funkiness and depthless umami. A few see-through slices of finnochiona from Salt Lake City and small slices of salami cured in the Italian red wine Barolo may seem like small portions, but they are mighty in flavor. If you've never had Italian cheeses like the delicious brie-like robiolo or creamy casatica di bufala, here's a great chance to try them. (Three-cheese and/or salume choices for \$15; 5 for \$20.)

Deviled eggs (\$7) are delicious with toppings like mortadella crumbs, a fat flake of smoked trout or a dollop of pesto. Add leek-stuffed peppers (\$8) or lemony marinated olives (\$5) for a mini antipasto buffet. Avocado and grapefruit salad (\$10), one of my favorites, is more California than Italy but is delicious and fits right in.

There are pizzas with a crust like a handkerchief, best in their first, oh, 8 minutes, so share. The pizza bianco (\$13) with roasted corn nestling into fontina with a tasteful application of truffle oil and garlic was delicious.

My daughters, who lean vegetarian, were very happy with the meatless choices including two pizzas, and four pastas, like gnudi. Well, anyone would be happy with the gnudi (\$15). These lush, creamy golf ball-sized dumplings are made with the maximum possible amount of ricotta salata, and the minimum of flour to bind it. They are judiciously sauced with brown butter and crunchy nuggets of hazelnut.

Lamb spiedini (\$14) were chunks of lamb and fingerling potato on rosemary stick skewers, making a light meal with one of the contorni, or side dishes, though the rapini was almost overwhelmingly heavy on garlic. The lasagna (\$17) is lamb, and doesn't have all the cheesy filling we're used to, but still seemed a bit heavy.

Enoteca Emilia had been open a month, but the service hadn't completely organized itself. The wine list is intriguing and somewhat intimidating if you aren't familiar with Italian grapes and styles. We needed more authoritative advice. What we got was a little vague. The prices may seem a little high: You get a lot of flavor for your money, but don't go crazy ordering too many things. It will add up.

Enoteca Emilia



Where: 2038 Madison Road,
O'Bryonville

When: 4-11 p.m. Monday-Thursday;
4 p.m.-midnight Friday and
Saturday; 4-10 p.m. Sunday

Who: Margaret Ranalli, owner,
Jeremy Luers, chef, Pete Sedgwick,
wine director

Reservations: only taken for large
groups seated upstairs

Prices: salume and cheese
samplers: 3/\$15 or 5/\$20. Pizza
\$12-\$14; pasta \$15-\$17.

Miscellaneous: Accessible to
disabled. Full bar, outdoor seating

Phone: 513-834-5773

Web site:
www.facebook.com/EnotecaEmilia