

First look: Enoteca Emilia

Wine bar brings a taste of Italy to O'Bryonville

By Amy Schoenfeld
Special to Metromix
September 14, 2011



The wine selection is extensive. Pictured are a few of the bottles found on the wine rack. (Credit: Leigh Taylor | Metromix)

Enoteca Emilia

Address:

2038 Madison Road, Cincinnati, OH, 45208

Phone:

513-834-5773

Overall User Rating:



Hours:

5-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 5-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

Enoteca Emilia is the new kid on the O'Bryonville block.

The space, which used to be Balboa's, is now a modern

restaurant and wine bar that was so packed on a recent weekend night that they had a 90-minute wait time. My fiancé and I skipped on that and instead made it a weekday lunch date.

(Editor's note: After we posted this review, the restaurant announced it would stop lunch service to concentrate on dinner prep.)

The look: Cheers to whoever came up with the contemporary design concept of Enoteca: exposed brick, modern lighting and gray and peach-colored paint. A huge wine collection is displayed on a far wall, a nod to the Italian influence. Smooth jazz and easy listening played overhead as we scooted our bar stools in for a weekday lunch. The bar spans two rooms on the main floor and it's decorated with cute square vases filled with fresh flowers or wine corks.

They just opened in August and there are still a few items unfinished, like no mirror in the restroom and empty TV mounts in the corners.

The food: Put my fiancé and me in a nice restaurant and we gravitate towards the most buttery, cheesiest item on the menu, the cheesy bread (\$5). And wow, was it good. They call it Pane e Formaggio, or "cheesy bread." The small, rounded loaf of bread came wrapped in tin foil, hot from the oven. The inside was all melting garlic-butter and fontina cheese. Other appetizer items include fried polenta, deviled eggs, stuffed peppers and meatball sliders.

I was craving pasta, like the garganelli (tomato, basil, chili and breadcrumbs) or the bucatini (prosciutto, white wine, frisee and black pepper) but they only offer those on the dinner menu. So I picked the pizza margherita (\$12). The flat artisanal pizza was crispy in all the right places and was topped with tomatoes, mozzarella, basil and parmesan cheese.

Skewers were also a tempting item on the menu and my date got to pick from either the shrimp, lamb or chicken skewers. He chose the lamb, with rosemary, fingerling potatoes and fig

balsamic (\$13). It also came with a small watercress salad and what tasted like cucumber sauce for dipping. I snagged a piece of lamb; it was tender and the sauce was great. He said everything was "expertly cooked."

They also have salads, including an avocado and grapefruit salad, asparagus salad and grilled squid and shrimp salad.

We turned down dessert, but if you decide to stick around they have fried ricotta fritters, tiramisu, strawberry and peach cobbler and hazelnut gelato doused in espresso.

The drinks: Water (free) for me and Coke (\$1.79) for him.

The verdict: Enoteca Emilia would be perfect for a date; just make sure you're not in a hurry (we were there for an hour). I can't stop thinking about that cheesy bread, and the ambience and atmosphere of the place is totally cool. My fiancé and I already planned our rehearsal dinner for our wedding but Enoteca Emilia would fit that bill perfectly.