

Carpaccio dishes Italian classics

Wine bar offers global selection

By Scott Haring | Wednesday, April 1, 2009

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Carpaccio Tuscan Kitchen lives up to the saying, "Now that's Italian." The restaurant and wine bar is on the ground floor of the beautiful new Park Place hotel-housing-business complex in the ever-changing outer West Street area of Annapolis.

With the name Carpaccio, you should expect a full complement of the thinly sliced meat and fish plates for which **Italy** is so famous. Dishes range from filet mignon and sushi-grade tuna to baby Italian eggplant.

Italian meat, cheese and vegetable platters are another way to get started. For a sampling of all three, the market platter (\$15.99) offers cured meats (including salami, prosciutto and mortadella) along one side and Italian cheeses (including Parmigiano-Reggiano, Gorgonzola and pecorino) along the other. Artichoke hearts, roasted peppers, eggplant, olives and mushrooms fill a bowl down the middle. This superb collection offers perfect contrasts, like the mild mortadella and the salty speck, the creamy and tangy Gorgonzola and the crumbly Parmesan.

The eggplant was bursting with garlic and rich olive oil, and the roasted peppers seemed extra-sweet.

The house breads complement this platter. Our favorite was a warm, crispy flat bread with just a light brush of marinara and garlic clove.

Nine brick-oven pizzas are on the roster as well as a dozen pan pizzas, all Tuscan style.

We were surrounded by diners ordering plates of risotto, as the menu lists four varieties. One of these, risotto al funghi porcini, is arborio rice cooked slowly in a mushroom broth with imported Italian porcini mushrooms, drizzled with white-truffle olive oil and topped with shaved Parmesan.



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Aqua-terra dinner entrees include paccheri Michelangelo (\$21.99). Large artesian pasta tubes are sauteed with calamari, Manila clams, mussels, oven-dried tomatoes and arugula in a trebbiano wine sauce, then topped with crabmeat. The pasta tubes were perfectly prepared and tossed with an abundance of freshly seasoned seafood.

Cervino al fichi (\$24.99) is tender venison scallopini in a fresh fig-and-port-wine demi-glaze reduction, served with Tuscan potatoes. For me, having relatives in areas where venison is fairly standard fare, this dish was a real treat. The venison was melt-in-your-mouth tender. Its earthy flavor was wonderfully accented by the fig-and-port sauce; there was a perfect sweetness and richness that was not overpowering. The figs were almost like candy. The potatoes were well-seasoned slices, nice and crispy on the outside and soft and comforting on the inside.

Salmon casino (\$20.99) is a Norwegian fillet slivered and filled with Parmesan, fire-roasted peppers, bacon bits and herb bread crumbs, then broiled and served over a crab-bisque risotto.

You can find salmon on just about every restaurant's menu, but this definitely was a fresh approach. The seasoning was light, so the salmon flavor burst through. The crab-bisque risotto was equally impressive, filled with flavors of fresh herbs and tomatoes and a very generous portion of sweet lump crab.

The menu is large - some would say ridiculously large. But if the kitchen can put out every dish at the quality sampled, I wish it the best. More choices for the discriminating diner.

Most of the desserts are made in-house, but the cannolis come from a local Italian bakery, and the gelato and sorbet come from Italy. Italian cheesecake was a real treat. Made with ricotta cheese, it has a heartier texture than most versions. A layer of Nutella in the middle gave an extra touch of sweetness, and orange zest perked up a cheese layer. Other desserts are creme brulee, tiramisu, chocolate ganache cake and Key lime pie.

Carpaccios' wine bar offers a hefty selection of labels from around the world.

RESTAURANT: Carpaccio Tuscan Kitchen and Wine Bar, 1 Park Place, Annapolis; 410/268-6569; www.carpacciotuscankitchen.com

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

PRICES: Soups and salads \$6.99 to \$7.99; appetizers \$5.99 to \$17.59; carpaccio \$9.99 to \$13.99; pizzas \$10.99 to \$19.99; dinner entrees \$14.99 to \$36.99

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