

DINING OUT

Bacco sets new style for an Italian restaurant

BY ELEANOR HEALD

Did metro Detroit need another Italian restaurant? If that question references the new Bacco Ristorante in Southfield, that opened at the end of March, the answer is an unequivocal "yes." Bacco is unlike all the others.

Chef-proprietor Luciano Del Signore of Fonte d'Amore in Livonia and his wife Monica have taken the concept of modern Italian to new heights in the complete remodeling of the former Ristorante di Modesta. With the aid of personal friend and private designer Carmine Martone, they've created a Manhattan-style, contemporary atmosphere with clean lines, and understated elegance.

Warm cherry wood, stainless steel accents, custom designs and paintings from Park West Gallery in Southfield form backdrops for the visual focal point, colorful murals painted by Barney Judge of Ann Arbor.

Attention to the smallest details make Bacco unique among its Italian restaurant peers. The mood set is perfect from the decor and fresh flowers to the contemporary Italian music. No Frank Sinatra, no strolling musicians, no operatic arias, and no traditional Italian melodies. Bacco is about the unexpected and it's delightful.

"It's our personal interpretation of Bacco, the god of wine," Luciano

Bacco Ristorante

Where: 29410 Northwestern Highway (east side, north of 12 Mile Road), Southfield (248) 356-6600

Open: Lunch, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; Dinner, 5:30-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and until 11 p.m., Friday and Saturday

Menu: Contemporary cuisine from many regions of Italy
Cost: A la carte menu with lunch \$9-17 and dinner \$20-32. All main courses include appropriate potato and vegetable plate garnishes
Reservations: recommended.

said. "I'm passionate about Italian culture, food and wine. I consider la dolce vita as a balance of work, play, food and family. Italian lifestyle and regional cuisine is all about simplicity and the use of a few flavorful ingredients."

Complete package

Atmosphere and food do not create an outstanding restaurant. Human factors are essential. Luciano in the kitchen. Monica greeting and seating diners. Then, at Bacco, there's Milanese native maitre d' Marcello Giuffrida who brings Italian five-star polish to each table. His European restaurant education is unmistakable and shows in the Bacco wait-staff whom he has trained. Dressed in tuxedo shirts, black vests, and bow ties with long white aprons, the waitstaff adds just the right note of tradition.

In addition to being the most stylishly-dressed maitre d' in the

area, his knowledge of Italian wines is amazing. If you're not familiar with the extensive Italian wine list (predicted to grow even larger with time), allow Marcello to pair the wine appropriately to your menu choices. You won't be disappointed.

At Fonte d'Amore in Livonia, Luciano concentrates on foods from his family's roots in the Abruzzo region of Italy. "With Bacco," said Monica, "we're using the foods of many regions of Italy on the menu. Luciano renews his chef's skills continually and comes up with new ideas from our annual trips to Italy."

Bacco's lunch menu contains a number of the same items as the dinner menu but has more salads and three paninis. At dinner, two cold antipasti, Caprese from the Campania region (imported buffalo mozzarella and red tomatoes with extra virgin olive oil, fresh basil and sea salt) and Carpaccio

di Melanzane alla Brace from Abruzzo (grilled eggplant topped with caramelized onions, capra cheese and aged balsamic vinegar) are standouts.

Among warm antipasti, try Capesante Dorate al Profumo di Taurus (pan roasted diver scallops with porcini mushroom cream sauce), a specialty from Sardegna. Zuppa di Cozze all'Arabiata from the region of Puglia is the classic preparation of mussels, sauteed with garlic, olive oil, chili peppers and tomatoes.

Strozzapreti Norcina is an outstanding pasta with Palmino sauce, Italian sausage, black truffles and wine. Spaghetti alla Scoglio from Puglia features scampi, shrimp, mussels, clams and scallops with fresh tomatoes, white wine and garlic. Try it with 1999 Don Luigi di Mayo Norante, a wine from the region of Molise. From Italy's Piedmont, Cavatelli ai Porcini is a fabulous mix of fresh porcini and wild mushrooms in a white wine cream sauce.

It's outstanding with the but-tery, rich 1998 Antinori Cuvare della Sala Chardonnay.

Hands down favorite among Secondi Piatti (principal plates) is a Sicilian specialty Misto di Pesce alla Griglia. Marinated and grilled giant scampi, shrimp, calamari, diver scallops and salmon are served atop sauteed spinach.

Try this with 1999 Lis Neris, a sauvignon blanc from Friuli.

Other top choices are Pollo al Rosmarino (pan-roasted Amish chicken breast), Costoletta di Vitello alla Brace (prime veal chop) and Scaloppine al Limone, a specialty of Lombardy.

Portions are reasonably sized or can be shared, leaving the possibility open for dessert. The most unique is Frutti Ripieni, fresh fruit stuffed with five choices of Italian sorbet.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 18648.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLNISKY

That's Italian: Bacco Ristorante serves up regional cuisine that is "all about simplicity and the use of few flavorful ingredients," says owner Luciano Del Signore.

In Southfield:
Monica
and
Luciano
Del Signore
pose
with their
Maitre
D'Marcello
Giuffrida
at
Bacco Ristorante.



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