

Romantic restaurants

Play Cupid, woo your Valentine with a lovely dinner

BY RENEE SKOGlund
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Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet ... but not as sweet as dining with you!

We've spared no expense (yours) to find the most romantic, fine-dining spots in town to dine and woo your favorite Valentine. If the atmosphere doesn't seduce you, the food will. And if you do, do make reservations quicker than a heart-beat.

Cafe Cortina, 30715, W. 10 Mile, Farmington Hills, (248) 474-3033. Cost: About \$100, excluding wine. Dinner hour: Begins 5 p.m.

Good cooking is like love, simple yet divine, said Adrian Tonon, who co-owns the restaurant with his mother, Rita.

Since 1976, lovers have wined and dined at Cafe Cortina, especially in the fireplace room. "It's very cozy, warm and welcoming. There's something in the air that's so romantic," says Tonon.

Tonon suggests starting with an antipasti of bruschetta, a portobello mushroom au poivre, and sliced zucchini with fresh mozzarella and tomato. For pasta, maybe something with fresh tomato, cream and a hint of goat cheese. For the main entree, why not a braised leg of lamb sliced at your table? Dessert, of course, will be chocolate.

Emily's — 605 N. Center, Northville, (248) 550-0505. Cost: Appetizers, \$7-\$18; dinners, \$19-\$35. Dinner hour: Begins 5:30 p.m.

Small and intimate, Emily's is in a Victorian-style house. There's room for just 60 diners, some of whom will be lucky

enough to sit by the fireplace. "We're a romantic restaurant with really, really wonderful French-inspired cuisine," said owner and chef Rick Halberg.

Suggestion: An appetizer of chardonnay lobsters au poivre with butter-baked scallops, an arugula salad with cured foie gras, and an entree of roast duck with vanilla-flavored sweet potatoes. For dessert? A chocolate truffle tart with macadamia praline and a port wine caramel.

Cafe Bon Homme — 844 Penniman, Plymouth, (734) 453-5260. Cost: Four-course prefixed dinner, \$45 per person. Dinner hour: Begins 5 p.m. (last reservation 8 p.m.)

Owner Greg Goodman promises to "pull out all the stops" for Valentine couples dining in his comfortably elegant little restaurant, which he describes as a "chic, upscale, Left Bank bistro."

Goodman doesn't know all the delights Chef Jeff Condit will prepare for the Valentine Day weekend, but they will have a French influence with lots of "shoot-from-the-hip" American imagination. Dessert will definitely be chocolate enough to cause heart palpitations.

La Bistecca Italian Grille — 39405 Plymouth Road, Livonia, (734) 254-0400. Cost: About \$100 for two, excluding wine.

Dinner hour: Begins 5 p.m.

The atmosphere is so conducive to a special evening because of the food and our extreme attention to detail and service," said owner Jerry Costanza. La Bistecca specializes in Piedmontese beef, considered by many chefs to be the most tender.

Suggestions: Gamberi con Asparago (a shrimp-and-asparagus appetizer for two) followed by a sampling of homemade ravi-

oli and an entree of filet mignon, lobster or a surf 'n' turf. Dessert must be tiramisu, made from the chef's own heart-throbbing recipe. Top it off with a cappuccino.

Marco's — 32748 Grand River, downtown Farmington, (248) 477-7777. Cost: Entrees \$15-\$27. Dinner hour: Begins 3 p.m. Monday-Friday, 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Marco's is small, just 20 tables for up to 80 lucky diners. "It's a very romantic place — candlelight, white linen tablecloths and fresh flowers all over the place. It's very intimate, dimly lit, with soft music in the background," says owner and chef Marco Conte.

Conte suggests teasing your appetite with pan-sautéed calamari tossed with lemon. Next, try the Filet a la Gorgonzola or Cherry Hazelnut Chicken, a succulent breast sautéed with Michigan dried cherries and a splash of Frangelico. For dessert, it's definitely the heart-shaped creme brûlée with fresh strawberries.

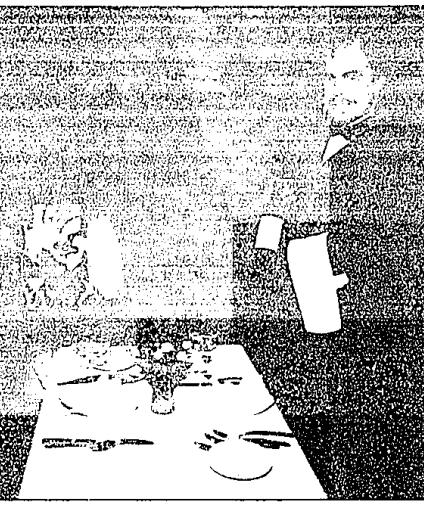
MacKinnon's — 126 E. Main, Northville, (248) 348-1991. Cost: \$100 for two. Dinner hour: 5-10 p.m.

For 20 years, the restaurant's brick walls, lace curtains and Tiffany lamps have charmed countless diners. "We are a small, romantic family-owned restaurant in a quaint Victorian town," says owner Tom MacKinnon.

Suggestions: The appetizer platter for two, which includes crab pasta, French tacos, escargot, the house pate, shrimp cocktail, oysters and crab-stuffed mushrooms. Next, an entree of rack of lamb with black currant sauce. For dessert, there are choices: A towering chocolate

mouse with fresh strawberries, chocolate sauce and a chocolate roof or Banana Wellington, a puffed pastry with caramel sauce, walnut brown sugar, and rum.

Fonte D'Amore — 32020 Plymouth Road, Livonia, (734) 422-0770. Dinner hour: 4:10 p.m. Cost: \$12-\$26, regular



STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CARNEZIO

Table for two: Fireside dining is just sooo romantic at Cafe Cortina. Tim Bailey stands ready to make your Valentine's Day dinner a memorable occasion ... a little wine, a little pasta, and lots of attention.

menu.

Could lovers go wrong at a place whose name means "fountain of love"? Impressed, the owner Luciano DeSignore. The setting is dark and soft-colored with cozy booths and a fireplace. We kind of theme on romance."

DeSignore suggests shrimp

scampi appetizer, followed by Filet Mignon, a pan-roasted center-cut tenderloin with shallots, mushrooms, Marsala, brandy and cream. You might also try a little rigatoni with fresh tomatoes in a basil sauce with fresh mozzarella. For dessert, nothing other than a house-made tiramisu.

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