

Entrée New

Authentic never tasted so good

Grilled calamari could be the best in the city by Janice Warren

RECENTLY, I HAVE had the joy of visiting Italy, so the promise of an "authentic" Italian meal (as described by the Florentia chef and co-owner Bruno Soleri) has me salivating.

This long, narrow space typical of Mt. Pleasant Road is emblazoned by a stunning wall-length painting by co-owner and acclaimed Italian artist Marco Sassone.

Front of house staff are charming, the lighting is flattering, and the aromas are intoxicating. The menu is not large and, this evening, is rendered even smaller by the absence of one of the three pastas and one of the four antipasti. As it is only 7:30 p.m. on a quiet Wednesday evening, this comes as a surprise.

The bread plate offers a fabulous assortment of focaccia, and the olive oil provided for dipping is redolent with the fruit of the vineyard.

Bresaola e rucola sees thinly sliced beef cured rather than raw, and this process imparts a somewhat smoky taste to it. It is graced by shaved Parmesan and generously doused with fresh lemon and olive oil. The entirety is then strewn with Italian arugula, which is more delicate than that which is commonly found in Toronto and used extravagantly in Italy on everything from pizza to panini. A beautiful dish to start the show (\$10.50).

Even more impressive is the grilled calamari. Everyone makes this dish — here dubbed insalata con calamari all griglia — but few do it well. This could be the best in the city. Two large pieces have been immaculately cleaned and are singed around the edges while remaining tender on the tongue with the perfect caress of fresh basil (\$11.50).

The absence of ravioli with roasted eggplant and fresh mozzarella, leaves only rigatoni with tomato sauce and penne Florentia. Since the latter is described as penne pasta with fresh cherry tomatoes, sun-dried tomatoes, almonds and arugula (see, I told you), it is the clear



Florentia owners Marco Sassone and Bruno Soleri have spun magic on Mt. Pleasant

choice. It is a given that the pasta will be properly cooked, but I am delighted that the cherry tomatoes have been roasted before being added to the dish, intensifying their natural sugar, and the addition of almonds is a welcome change from the usual pine nuts (\$13.50).

Again, we are surprised that there are only two entrees:

calamari, but the clams are missing in action (\$22).

Three desserts are available, but we have room for only one: we go straight for the chocolate. I know that molten lava cakes are nearly as ubiquitous as crème brûlée but that doesn't make them less addictive. To put a private signature on this version, a hint of chili has been added to the mix. What a clever counterpoint to the unctuous warm dessert that flows across our plates. And, the whipped cream is the real stuff (\$8.50).

The wine list is brief but user-friendly and draws on the regions of Italy. We try two different by-the-glass offerings, both under \$10, and both are delicious.

I have made note of the fact that the carte is on the short side. It could be said that all a diner needs is one dish to make her happy, but if the host is seeking repeat business, there should be more to tempt her to return.

I do hope that we see the famed Tuscan soups on offer to ward off the coming winter.

"CHEQUE PLEASE"

FLORENTIA

379 Mt. Pleasant Rd.

416-545-4220

Dinner for two excluding tax,
tip and alcohol

\$75

chicken and fish.

Caciucco de dentice, a Tuscan rendition of red snapper with shrimps, clams and garlic, beckons. A generous portion of snapper is cooked to flakiness and gently blanketed by a robust tomato sauce with a kick. The fish is adorned with two mussels, two shrimps and two pieces of