



810 Matson Place - Queen's Tower
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Dining Room with a View

Val Prevish | *Cincinnati Enquirer* 05/25/2008

EAST PRICE HILL - Joan and Frank Lenkerd, owners of Primavista Restaurant, have not stayed in business for nearly 20 years by making mistakes, and they are betting that their recent investment in new décor for their well-known restaurant will be the beginning of another 20 years of success.

With one of the best views in the city, Primavista has racked up many accolades during its 19 years on the West Side of Cincinnati in the Queen's Tower building. Just this year, Primavista was voted "Best Restaurant with a View" in CityBeat, one of a long list of awards the restaurant has earned over the years, including "Best Italian," "Best Date Spot" and "Top 25 Restaurants in Cincinnati."

Overlooking a panoramic sweep of downtown, no seat in the house has a bad view. The dining floor is tiered so that every table can take advantage of the huge windows that line the entire east side of the restaurant.

While the restaurant has long been lauded for its food and view, its slightly out-of-the-way location in an area that is not part of a main entertainment or shopping district has made it more challenging to keep Primavista's name in the public eye, said Joan Lenkerd.

But changing development planned in East Price Hill that will add medical office space and several restaurants and bars, and reinvent the area as the "Incline District," has the couple heartened that more diverse traffic will impart renewed life into the neighborhood and bring Primavista additional customers.

"We get people from all over the city," said Joan Lenkerd. "But we don't get any walk-by traffic. Although we're only five minutes from downtown, people don't see us, so we do get forgotten. But we're hoping that will change with the new development."

To make sure the interior of the restaurant keeps up with the view and with guests' expectations, the Lenkerds completely redecorated the dining room this winter to brighten it and bring it up to date with changing trends, said Joan Lenkerd.

The changes, the biggest since the restaurant opened in 1989, include a new color scheme featuring warm hues such as Tuscany gold and rich, brown woods. There is new carpeting and tile in the 155-seat dining room and bar, and a new sound system. Also, the seating was reupholstered and new artwork was added to complement the new look.



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In addition to the decorating, the Lenkerds are adding some promotions to attract new diners during weekdays. For instance, on Mondays they will feature martinis, margaritas and manhattans for \$5. On Thursdays, they will offer half price on selected wine bottles with the purchase of two entrees. They are also auditioning musical acts for live performances.

Their popular menu will remain the same with the addition of occasional seasonal dishes, said Frank Lenkerd. Longtime chef Christopher Prince, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, tN.Y., has created a menu that includes many Italian favorites such as osso buco, lamb chops, veal saltimbocca and lobster pasta. Seasonal items include Copper River salmon in the spring and early summer.

"All our sauces are made from homemade stocks," said Frank Lenkerd. "We sell a lot of lamb, fish and veal, including our own veal meatballs and Italian sausage. People will come for a special occasion and then come back again and again because the food is so good."

Longtime customers rave about the food and the view at Primavista.

Penny Schenk of Cleves, who has dined frequently at Primavista with her husband, Bill Hummel, since it opened, said that the food and service keep them returning as often as three times a month.

"The food has to be good to keep us coming back, but the service is also impeccable," she said. "The waiters have been there many years, and so you develop a relationship with them, too. We're always treated very well."

Schenk said she considers the view from the dining room to be the best of any restaurant in the city, which is also a big attraction.

"Once people see that fantastic view, they are sold," she said. "It's the best panoramic view in the city. On Friday and Saturday nights it's packed, so they must be doing something right."



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Bev Kirby of Green Township and her husband, Grant, who also dine frequently at Primavista, about twice a week, said she thinks of the restaurant as a place to go for both casual and upscale dining.

"It's a great place for fine dining or if you just want a glass of wine and a pizza," she said.

The view and the topnotch service also make it a great spot for entertaining, she added, saying that she and her husband booked a portion of the restaurant recently for their son's rehearsal dinner.

"Joan and Frank go out of their way to make it special," she said. "They really take care of the details."

Frank Lenkerd said the reason that so many customers enjoy coming back to Primavista time and again is because he and Joan and their staff truly look forward to hosting their dining guests each night.

"The heart of it is really loving what you do and taking care of people," said Frank. "We enjoy the people we work with and we enjoy taking care of customers. That's why it's a success."