



810 Matson Place - Queen's Tower
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Primavista makes primo Italian

Polly Campbell | Cincinnati Enquirer 07/24/2008

Is there any restaurant cuisine more useful or versatile than Italian? It's a category that includes some of the area's oldest (Scotti's), most home-town (LaRosa's) expensive (Boca), trendiest (Via Vite) and conservative but photogenic (Pompilio's).

Primavista, on the edge of East Price Hill, must owe its long success to a combination of all of the above. While its menu and service are in the fine-dining category, it's also a great place for a table of friends to sit down to big plates of spaghetti and delicious veal meatballs. In business for almost 20 years, Primavista is still relevant, as the menu is freshened from the deep well of Italian food, both modern and classic.

And there's the skyline view. Other restaurants have great views, but none are quite as sweeping as this. From every table, you can see trains crossing the Ohio River, the far-away towers of Mount Adams and the castle-like profile of Hughes High School. (The new convention center sign spells out "Cincinnati" in case you forget where you are.)

The dining room has recently been redone, though new colors and art haven't changed its essential characteristic: It's cozy and a little quirky. There's a medieval-like door guarding the dining room, which is furnished with antiques, silk flowers and tables topped with white cloths under glass.

We started with the wonderful creamy roasted garlic that's set on the table along with bread and butter - trendy and eye-opening in the 1990s, now it's just simply delicious. We all loved the ravioli starter (\$7.99); square pasta filled with spinach and Gorgonzola is topped with a crunchy walnut pesto and slivered basil. Spinach salad (\$5.99) gets a subtle Italian twist with warm anchovy-bacon dressing.

I ordered the risotto al funghi (\$16.99). It takes an extra half hour or so to prepare, but we never felt neglected by the two professional servers who looked after us. Arriving in a big bowl, unapologetically brown, the risotto is delicious: creamy, absolutely stuffed with earthy and aromatic mushrooms, and far too much to finish. It would be a nice thing to order for the table and share as a second course.

There is a large selection of veal scallopini. My friend ordered saltimbocca (\$25.99), a thin scallop of veal scented with sage and enriched with prosciutto. The melted fontina cheese that topped it was wonderful when warm, a bit much as it cooled. The accompanying green beans were crisply cooked and bright.



REVIEWS

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How do you say piece de resistance in Italian? That's what I'd call the fettuccine con aragosta (\$27.99). Precisely-cooked ribbon pasta is tangled with generous chunks of lobster and thinly-sliced vegetables and piled neatly in a pyramid. Its sauce carried the flavors with plenty of cream, but was still light and silken.

Primavista lists a nice selection of desserts and after-dinner drinks. Try the perfectly done tiramisu and linger - the setting invites it.

Primavista - 4 out of 5 stars (excellent)

Recommended dishes: Spaghetti with veal meatballs; ravioli with walnut pesto, fettuccine con aragosta

The scene: Popular with large groups, dressed-up couples

Sound level: A little difficult to hear when room is full

Vegetarian choices: Good. Salads, several pastas; penne with roasted tomatoes and portabellas, risotto with mushrooms, penne primavera, cheese-filled ravioli