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eG Forums _ Italy and Italian Cuisine _ Two Emilia Romagna trattorie

Posted by: fortedei on Jun 12 2007, 02:32 AM

A few years ago, the Gambero Rosso, in addition to listing its thoughts on the best restaurants in Italy, started to list its thoughts on the best trattorie in a section called Tre Gamberi. Over the last few years, we have tried two of them, La Brinca in Ne' which is south of Chiavari in Liguria and Osteria della Villetta in Palazzolo Sull'Oglio, near Brescia. This past weekend we tried two more, Da Amerigo in Savigno, 30 km. southwest of Bologna and Locanda al Gambero Rosso, near Bagno di Romagna, in the very southern part of Emilia Romagna at the Tuscan border.

We have been to La Brinca many times and very much enjoy it, even if we don't think it is the best trattoria in Ne' (we think Antica Trattoria dei Mosto is the better of the two on food, and almost, but not quite, comparable on wine). Sergio Circella of La Brinca has a passion for wine and we've never seen a better wine list in any trattoria. Osteria della Villetta is a gem and Maurizio Rossi is the consummate owner. A wonderful trattoria with hard to find Bresciani dishes, skillfully prepared.

So... it was with much enthusiasm that we looked forward to two more Tre Gamberi. The two trattorie are very different. Da Amerigo is the real deal. It is a classic trattoria serving very skillfully prepared Bolognese dishes. We arrived in Savigno late in the afternoon. Peeking through the window of the trattoria, we see the classic tableau... three elderly woman sitting at a table in the dining room, oblivious to the outside world, intently focused on rolling pasta, filling pasta and shaping pasta, for that night's dinner. The ingredients used in the dishes are first rate, the flavors are full, the plating is well done, the menu changes frequently and the wine list is well thought out. The owner, Alberto Bettini, his wife Susanna, and the rest of his family are warm and welcoming, the service is casual but professional, courteous and helpful, and most of all the whole meal was "natural" i.e. this is how we've done it for a long time, we enjoy doing it this way and we hope you like it. It is a very relaxed place and Susanna runs the dining room very well, helpful but not obtrusive and with a pace in the service that allows you to eat and then sit for a while before the next dishes are served. This is not a "rush rush" place; they want you to really enjoy the evening (on the other hand, there was no half hour wait for the next course). The physical setting is classic trattoria and reminded us of both Villetta and La Buca, very comfortable, but the decor is much the same as it was fifty years ago. As I said, the quality of the ingredients is exceptional, whether it was in the coniglio all' aceto balsamico (the best example of this classic that I've ever had) or the guancia di vitella brasata al barbera. The lasagna al forno was so well prepared, my wife said that the pasta was only a notch (no pun intended) below Bruna Santini's (our standard for excellence). Cherries from nearby Vignola on a simple baked dessert of light pound cake with a little vanilla custard was fantastic. Whether it was the warm tigelle or the quality of the mortadella, Bettini "gets it." One other thing: their nocino is fantastic and is available to buy at their dispensa. What a pleasure to have a meal at Da Amerigo.

The next evening we were at Locanda al Gambero Rosso. It felt contrived, much too formulaic, too much like a stage set of a trattoria, perhaps feeling a little full of themselves because of all the publicity. The Saragoni family couldn't have been nicer; in fact, perhaps a little too nice. How many times during a meal do you want to be interrupted to be asked if all is okay? Once, perhaps twice. Giuliana's husband who hovers about the dining room, moving constantly from table to table... asked us five times. Giuliana, coming out of the kitchen, asked us twice, as did her daughter. Why? Insecurity? Who knows but what an annoyance. So is the fact that one of the sommelier/waiters insisted on filling up the glasses as soon as we took a sip of wine. That was part of the hurried pace of the meal. Finish one dish and a minute later the next one appears. A number of tables turned over during the evening... not ours, because we refuse to be rushed (although we couldn't control the speed of the service), but it was clear for a number of other tables. The trattoria is off the main square in a charming little town, San Piero in Bagno (near Bagno di Romagna). It is a pleasant place and from all appearances it was going to be a meal on par with Da Amerigo. What a disappointment, particularly with the food. The menu had all the classic dishes from the area... from basotti to manfrigoli, from trippa in bianco to tortelli di patate. The wine list was fine, almost all from Emilia Romagna, but some good choices nonetheless. The skill in the food preparation was lacking as was the quality of some of the ingredients. The tortelli stuffed with potatoes had very good flavor, but the pasta was much too thick, something which should never happen in a trattoria which takes itself seriously. The spinach flan, actually a larger version of ravioli nudi, was heavy and overly sauced. My wife's piccione was dry and grey (very unappealing). When I saw on the menu agnello in umido, I thought how fortunate I'd be to have a dish you seldom see on a restaurant menu. The agnello was lacking in taste and was mostly fat. I ordered semifreddo of melone. The semifreddo was delicious, but it was plated with what looked to be a puddle of a bad version of crème anglaise and a puddle of chocolate sauce. Crème anglaise and chocolate sauce with semifreddo of melone? Where did that come from? I found out

when I decided to order another dessert... lattaiolo. The lattaiolo was absolutely leaden and guess what, was plated exactly the same way as the semifreddo, with the crème anglaise and chocolate suace. We paid the check. Giuliana's daughter then insisted that we go back to the kitchen to say goodbye to her mother. We did, graciously, although we asked ourselves why it was necessary. We wish them well, but we won't be back.

Two other brief notes on Piemonte. A few weeks ago had another fantastic meal at Da Renzo in Cervere. This was our sixth time there and although there have been some complaints on this site, we've never had less than really good experiences. We also went, for the first time, to Trattoria della Posta in Monforte D'Alba. A little old fashioned, lacking personality, but we thought the menu choices were very good, the dishes well prepared and very flavorful, and the wine list adequate. We'd probably go back at some point.

Posted by: cinghiale on Jun 12 2007, 06:51 AM

My gf and I ate at <http://www.amerigo1934.it/> in December 2005 and very much enjoyed it. We also stayed at the Design Inn, which is part of the Amerigo complex. Owner Alberto Bettini was most accommodating, as we arrived in Savigno late on December 26, when everything -- including the Inn -- was closed, but he arranged to have someone let us in. He was also kind enough to arrange a table for us for that night at Caminetto d'Oro in Bologna.



Dinner at the trattoria was the best of our meals on that trip to Bologna (which also included Osteria Minestraio). As fortedei notes, the ingredients are wonderful and all locally sourced. The setting is very relaxed and the service warm and accommodating.

We both ate from the seasonal menu. First up was "risotto" of potato with black truffle and a bean puree soup with fir...(?) mushrooms, the last of the season. We drank a fruity yet crisp Pignoletto Vallona.

Next were passarelli, a traditional Bolognese pasta made with bread, eggs, and pecorino romano cheese, though ours also had 20% farina, served with tartufo bianco, which though subtle gave the dish an enormous flavor.

For the lasagna w/ragú bianco and tartufo nero, my notes have only "wow", which serves I guess to accent fortedei's take. We also had cordonetti (semi-white wheat, ground at a nearby mill, plus farina 1) with mushrooms, also superb.

Secondi were goose three ways and truffled eggs. The goose included breast and leg, slow roasted for 6 hours, and sausage made from the neck, braised for 1-1/2 hours in goose stock. Very, very rich, with a dark, intense flavor. Contorno was stuffed cabbage with barley. The eggs were served two ways: fried and deep-fried after soft boiling.

About this time, Alberto came through the restaurant showing off a delivery of freshly bagged beccaccie, or woodcock:



Having hunted woodcock myself, I was disappointed that we weren't staying through the next evening's meal. Alberto also showed us several tordo (thrush) breasts that he was planning to serve the next night: so very tiny, maybe 2 inches long.

We skipped dessert but sampled liberally from the dispensa's digestivi:



I second fortedei's recommendation of the nocino from the dispensa and would add to that outstanding saba that I purchased.

Amerigo/Savigno can be a tad difficult to find, but it is certainly worth the trip.

Posted by: pedalaforste on Jun 12 2007, 01:26 PM

Thanks to both of you for the advice. This place sounds fantastic. I've cut and pasted it for my files as we are heading that way in November. Many thanks.

Cheers

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