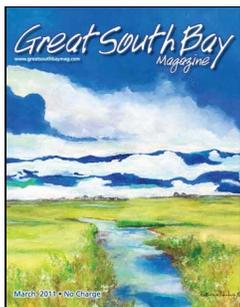


## Verace - DINING OUT

Article

Comments



599 Main Street Islip  
631.277.3800

Having been to sundry Italian restaurants on Long Island, I expected the usual when we arrived in this less than a year-old place. But from the minute I walked along the side of the building to its unique rear entrance through a welcoming outdoor patio where seasonal seating is embraced, I sensed that I was about to experience anything but ordinary.

Painstakingly created out of what was once a whimsical two-story gift shop on the charming Main Street of Islip hamlet, the renowned Bohlsen family of restaurateurs has effected a marvelous blend of old world meeting new here; one that respects authentic Italian fare with a careful respect for ecological matters. The décor is simple yet stunning with its mix of rich accents with natural and handsome reclaimed woods. The immaculate open-view kitchen areas are bordered on one side by a magnificent brick stove and the layout allows you to view almost every facet of the making of your meal from the braising of the freshest locally purchased vegetables (from Mike Massino's Organics Today Farm in East Islip) to the state-of-the-art double filtrations Natura system imported from Italy for flat and carbonated water.

When we arrived, the manager, Lauren Nuckel, ushered us past two chef stations where you could clearly view the making of your meal. She explained that when the second floor dining area is in use, there is a TV there for viewing as well. Our server, Laurie, immediately settled us in and explained the menu to us. She attributed brothers Michael and Kurt Bohlsen with the house's concept that the true Italian style is to enjoy three or four courses in small portions and that it is fun to share. Instead of getting a plate heaping over with pasta that will undoubtedly be too much for one person, Verace's portions are intended to be notably smaller so that one can taste various menu items and enjoy them. And so our experience began. I initially was a bit doubtful I would take to this concept, but I held open my mind and the more I looked around, the more I liked what I saw. As I scanned the rich woodworking and nicely contrasted colors, it was obvious no expense was spared, yet there was nothing ornate. I liked these surroundings. Next I noticed that all about the dining room, patrons seemed at ease. They were eating and smiling and talking and at comfort. I could feel a layer of stress melting away. And then I noticed the man with the wonderful face smiling and talking to everyone. He sported a spanking white chef coat and when he came to us, I was made to feel warmly welcomed by Executive Chef Francesco Torre. With his charming Italian accent he clearly purveyed that he loves what he does. The founding chef of Verace, Torre was born and raised in Italy and worked in California for seven years prior to his arrival here. Francesco explained that he felt fortunate to have a large part in the development of the prep area and he proudly showed off his pride and joy, a 100-year-old Berkel slicer, a rare bird from Rotterdam, that cuts items as thick or as thin as you could imagine. His enthusiasm for all things Verace was admirable. He spoke of the freshest ingredients with great pride and it is indeed evident that everything is homemade from the pasta to the breads to the desserts. And he called his pasta extruder machine with its eight custom-made brass dies the "beating heart" of Verace. The pasta maker may have the heart, but Francesco Torre clearly has the passion.

With Laurie's guidance we selected Crostini with Cheese and Honey (right from the farm) and Chic Pea Soup with Goat Cheese from among the Sfizi (little bites). From the Antipasti we selected a customized platter of Assorted Salumi with Olives, Cheeses and warm homemade walnut and raisin bread. From my first taste, and the visual on each serving, I knew this was going to be an evening to savor. We sampled a sausage and roasted pepper pizza, a wonderfully seasoned eight-inch thin crust delight and then from the Primi

(pasta), the most unusual Pasta Bolognese I have ever had. From the odd shape of the pasta to the chunks of tender meat (beef short rib mixed with pork and sweet sausage; not ground chopped meat), this was sensational and like nothing I have ever tasted in a Bolognese dish. The same can be said of so many of the items we tasted and that indeed became the fun of it. Also from the Pasta selections, we ordered the Rotini with Lobster and Squash blossoms, a fantastic concoction of chunks of lobster tail in a cream and brandy sauce; delectable.

As we moved through the menu and sampled selections, it became an adventure for us. Each flavor became a uniquely enjoyable experience and with each taste, I felt myself feeling more relaxed. I was indeed in a little bit of Heaven on Earth.

From the Secondi, we sampled the Braised Osso Bucco with Creamy-White Polenta, a deliciously tender veal dish made with Chef Torre's pride and insistence that the white polenta be imported from his native Massa as a tribute to his grandmother who perfected the dish for him. The Grilled Branzino was light and wonderful; there was just a hint of olive oil to it.

Our meals were complemented by house wines on tap, and no, they were not from a box. As part of their eco-conscience theme, the Bohlsens arranged to import wines from Italy in steel-lined Eco Kegs. By removing the cost and waste of bottles, corks and caps, the savings were passed along to the customer. Among the four kinds of tap wines is a house variety that is created at Rafael Vineyard on the East End.

The dessert menu is a talking one with about seven homemade items. We sampled Pistachio Gelato with candied pecan chips and then the absolute most wonderful Cannoli I have ever had. This baby had a sugar cookie shell with a kiss of cocoa powder and the cream filling was superb, a white chocolate mousse.

Verace serves lunch and dinner, is available for catering and conferences and offers special treats like Monday Night Wine Dinners and Happy Hour and late night half-price dishes.

There is much more to say about this menu but it cannot all be done here. The aura and class that the Bohlsens and crew have created is outstanding and Chef Torre deserves accolades for his enthusiasm and culinary magnificence. Verace, which loosely translated from Italian, means the real thing, is positioned to be anything but ordinary; it is, without question, unparalleled by the rest. •

**Back**