

Out of Italy

Genuine, Well-cooked Italian food in Coral Bay (of all places)

THE ITALIANS, it seems, are getting a bit hot under their dinner napkins about the questionable standard of Italian food served outside their country. So much so, they are now trying to introduce a policy of quality control on all classic Italian dishes served abroad, reasoning that the negative effect of ubiquitous Italian cuisine is ruining the reputation of one of the world's most exporting cooking cultures.

One can easily see why they are getting a bit miffed: hundreds of Italian restaurants open around the world every day and in most cases the only thing about them is the name, or tricolor flag, displayed outside.

That said, here in Cyprus we do have some problems getting our hands on the key elements that goes into making proper Italian cuisine: fresh, reasonably-priced ingredients and an understanding that this form of cooking is all about good ingredients and preparing them sympathetically.



The Coral Bay area is, for most diners, strictly a tourist la la land with hordes of scantily clad, lobster-red folk sporting navel studs that, come sundown, slip into their Persil whites and go in hunt of sustenance. Many end up at Trattoria La Vigna and although they may be brave enough to have had a stud inserted into a delicate body part or sport the battle of Trafalgar tattooed on their backs they go there because they feel safe, for an inordinate fear of the culinary unknown still exists.

La Vigna may easily win over its rivals by first getting punters through the door. But the big question is, do they then get quality, value for money and genuine cooking once inside?

In the splendid company of three splendid friends, we settled down to graze through the La Vigna Menu; this, I am happy to report, is comfortingly familiar with sufficient dishes to satisfy even the pickiest of customers.

For the ultra conservative there's classic minestrone or a starter of light bruschetta with melted mozzarella, a well packed Calzone and a quite delicious dish of half-shelled mussels baked in the oven with pancetta (Italian bacon), creamy white wine sauce and parmesan cheese. Then, we were treated to a dish of outrageously thin deep fried vegetables (Verdura Mista Fritti), which we attacked like a Hoover switched to turbo.

A big hit was the tortellini Gratinate: meat filled pasta in a creamy tomato and mushroom sauce with a topping of grilled mozzarella.

Chef Panicos Argyrou has a serious regard for the beauty of a simple of simple prepared pasta, a talent he honed when working in England at the Plymouth based Bella Napoli restaurant. He then proved his skill by preparing Aglio Olio e Peperocino, a perfect partnership of olive oil, garlic and chopped chilies.

It was not easy task choosing our preferred pasta dish as the chef gave us such a super range but regulars seemingly travel here for the Penne Torinese; strips of sautéed chicken breast served with fresh spinach, tomatoes, white wine and a dash of cream. Or you can have the beef fillet in the Linguine Al Manzo, Veal with fettuccine in the signature La Vigna dish, lashings of seafood, and of course the good old Spag Bol.

Then each of us each tried a sliver of pizza that had been baked in the clay oven. It had a super thin crust but was thick with flavour.

Inside there's a lovely warm atmosphere in the evening, with tables not so close together that you are forced to listen to "tourist tales" and folk comparing their varying levels of skin frying.

Outside there's a spacious eating area and a separate non-smoking area.

The other key selling point about La Vigna is the wine list, created by Emilios, the ebullient owner and a man who has no truck with conforming to bland convention. He has, along with local offerings, imported wines from Argentinean, Chile, Italy and South Africa. Oh! And not forgetting the puddings ricotta cheesecake (mmmh), rounded off with a strong Molina Espresso.

So, would an Italian, after eating at La Vigna, feel the chef had done their country's cuisine a disservice? No way. This Trattoria is as good as a genuine article as you can get here in Cyprus without going down the full blown ristorante route. In my book it deserves to seduce many more customers, enticing them into finding out what real 'out of Italy' cuisine is all about.

BY JILL CAMPBELL MACKAY

VITAL STATISTICS

SPECIALTY Good Pastas and Veal Dishes (Also Take Away Service)

SEATING 140 inside, 80 outside

WHERE Coral Bay

CONTACT 26 813755

BOOKING only to be on the safe side

PRICE anything from £8 per head to £12-£15 per head without wine