

THE REVIEW LA DOLCE VITA AT SPAGGI'S

BY DAVID COHEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PRISCILLA IEZZI

Chef/Owner Henry Gonzalez of Spaggi's has an ambiance and decor to perfectly showcase his culinary artistry. Very little expense has been spared to design an elegantly comfortable setting for patrons to dine in a leisurely and upscale manner. It's a fine setting to appreciate Chef Henry's take on modern and classic regional Italian fare.

Upon being seated, you're brought a lovely spread consisting of Kalamata olives, garlic, artichoke hearts, sundried tomatoes and roasted red peppers served with crispy flat bread.

Our first appetizer was ahi tuna carpaccio sprinkled with diced purple onions, capers and shaved parmigiana, then drizzled with white truffle oil. It was a bit dry, but the flavors were spectacular. The presentation was enhanced by tomato sculpted roses and chunks of aged provolone.

Next came the antipasto fantastico, an aptly named dish consisting of two clams and two mussels topped with marinara sauce; fresh sliced garlic; shrimp scampi cooked in lemon juice, garlic, paprika and butter; Kalamata olives; gorgeously prepared, ethereally light calamari fritti; marinated artichoke hearts; and grilled eggplant, zucchini and squash. An added feature was some slices of mesquite chicken quesadilla flavored with chipotle. This dish, by itself, could easily feed two for dinner.

The Asiago potatoes were an unusual touch: seven small white potatoes scooped out and refilled with Asiago cheese and chiles—great bite-size morsels to nibble on.

The insalata del Ana is named after Henry's wife and provides an excellent blend of flavors and intriguing textures: mixed baby greens and romaine with caramelized pecans, crumbled feta cheese, diced mangoes and fresh raspberries tossed in a blend of raspberry vinaigrette and ranch dressing.

The Chino Ranch corn chowder contains whole kernels from one of Southern California's finest organic farms in a light broth blended with cream and a touch of champagne, resulting in intense corn flavors



short order

WHERE: 1651 W. Foothill Blvd., Upland; (909) 579-0497

AMBIANCE: Elegant and comfortable, with original oil paintings, gorgeous wood accents, and a decorative iron wine "tree" on a shelf above the banquette in the main dining room.

HOURS: Lunch 11-2:30 Mon.-Fri., Dinner 5-9 Mon.-Thurs., 4-10 Fri. & Sat.

DINNER ENTREE PRICES: \$12-\$39

CREDIT CARDS: All majors.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES: Regular wine dinners and catering. Private room for parties; whole restaurant can be rented out for functions on Sundays.

CORKAGE: \$15

EXTRAS: Free dessert offered on customer's birthday.

imparting a fruity sweetness to the flavors of the salmon. The unusual preparation is silky in texture and would match up perfectly with a fruit-forward Central Coast pinot noir.

The linguine in clam sauce contains eight small clams in their shells in an understated white wine broth with olive oil and shredded parsley. The pasta is perfectly al dente, but I'd opt for the tangy tomato version to add some zip.

One of the evening's specials was the Chilean sea bass, a marvelously moist and succulent fillet which flakes off when touched with a fork. It's topped with a lovely caramelized Maui onion confit and a sauce consisting of a blend of morel, shitake, oyster and porcini mushrooms in a balsamic-port wine blend incorporating sundried tomatoes.

The final entrée was Spaghettini Venetian. It's a cornucopia of seafood—scallops, mussels, clams, squid tentacles, salmon, lobster tails and pieces of fish fillet tossed with garlic and extra virgin olive oil in a light tomato broth. This is a great dish for sopping up the broth with some grilled garlic bread.

There are two flambéed desserts—Bananas Foster and Cherries Jubilee. And don't miss the awesome chocolate soufflé accompanied by La Gelateria's Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream and a raspberry chocolate port sauce. The apple tart sits atop a plate streaked with alternating lines of raspberry coulis and chocolate sauce, as does the dynamite tiramisu.

It's virtually impossible not to have a meal that will linger in your memory until your next visit to Spaggi's. ●

CLOSE-UPS: Lamb chops (opposite page); Spaghettini Venetian (top), Chef Henry Gonzalez (center left) and salmon fillet.

in a velvety base.

The final appetizer is a signature dish of Henry's—the three-cheese tomato tart—actually a tower consisting of alternating layers of red and yellow tomatoes interspersed with melted cheeses in a champagne cream sauce flecked with fresh basil. It's an unusual and richly satisfying creation.

My favorite entrée of the evening was the osso buco—a huge, luscious veal shank which just about fell off the bone—sitting on top of a not particularly creamy saffron risotto, surround-

ed by a medley of fresh vegetables. The meat cooks in its own juices for four hours with sage and a touch of rosemary. It's a textbook version of osso buco. Alternatively, you can order it on a bed of fettucine tossed in white truffle oil and peas.

The costatella di agnello were four superb, perfectly medium rare lamb chops prepared with porcini mushrooms in a shallot, garlic, tarragon red wine demi-glaze.

The salmon fillet is prepared with a Grand Marnier brandy/apricot glaze,