



July 16, 2010

Locally owned Via Vite fine fit for lively Fountain Square scene

*By Polly Campbell
pcampbell@enquirer.com*

In the last three years, Fountain Square has become the beating heart of the city, with music and activity and people mingling day and night.

Just as exciting as the programming, which showcases local original music, is the fact that the prime restaurant space on the square went to local restaurant Via Vite from the Pietoso family.

It's easy to imagine that the music might have been all safe cover bands, and the restaurant a hokey, cheerful chain. Instead, you walk in from the bustle of the square to a restaurant that is confidently itself, offering simple, classic Italian food in a simple, contemporary space.

The interest of the décor comes naturally: the jumping flames in the tiled kitchen open to the bar area; the windows of the main dining room looking out on the trees of the square.

There are simple chandeliers shaped like branches, two high-backed upholstered booths and the underside of the stairs, painted a flashy green. Chef Cristian Pietoso's menu offers similarly unadorned dishes featuring ingredients that speak for themselves.

Take the tagliatelle with pesto sauce and rock shrimp (\$14) from a recent offering of specials. Tender homemade pasta and nicely cooked shrimp were tossed with a bright-green, creamy but textured pesto sauce, so the entire dish was the same color, and every bite was delicious.

The four-ingredient salad of beets roasted al dente and barely dressed, roasted asparagus, whipped goat cheese and two toasts (\$8) can be eaten in delicious combination bites of your own choosing.

Caesar salad (\$6) is made with spicy arugula. Eggplant parmigiano (\$10), served as a first course, is whittled down to its basics: eggplant sliced the long way, layered with a lively tomato sauce and a little cheese in a gratin dish.

Seared salmon (\$25) has an interesting touch: The filet is wrapped in a spiral. But the dish is made lovely by the pile of spinach under it and the shredded radicchio salad on the side.

Desserts include Madison's gelato (\$6) with its wonderful, straightforward flavors, chocolate panna cotta (\$7) served with berries and a lovely cheesecake (\$6.50) served with a bitter orange sauce.

When Via Vite trips up, though, it's because the approach is too simple and becomes nonchalant.

There needs to be some more bustle and effort. The greeting from the hostess was minimal - in fact, there was no greeting, just an unsmiling "Reservations? Follow me." The clearly bored server who recited the specials one day did not reverse the unwelcoming impression.

And when simplicity in cooking is not perfect, it can be just boring. The linguine with clam sauce was bland and didn't have enough clams. The roasted pork tenderloin, ordered medium as suggested, came with a raw center. While the peperonata of mixed colors of peppers next to it was very good, there was almost no sauce, nothing to tie it to the pork, no extra element to turn it into a memorable

restaurant dish.

Additional Facts

Via Vite

Where: 520 Vine St., Downtown

When: 11 a.m.-10 p.m.. Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday; 4-10 p.m. Sunday Bar with pizza menu open until 1 p.m. Monday-Saturday

The scene: Business diners, groups of friends in main dining room, some solo diners at bar

Reservations: Taken at www.opentable.com

Prices: Appetizers and salads \$7-\$14; pastas and entrées \$17-\$29; desserts \$6-\$7

Vegetarian choices: Several pizzas and salads, potato gnocchi with vodka sauce and spinach and ricotta ravioli, side dishes

Miscellaneous: Accessible to disabled; outdoor dining on upstairs terrace. Private space available.

Phone: 513-721-8483

Website: www.viaviterestaurant.com
