

Butterflies in Your Stomach

Ristorante Farfalla creates a flutter of Italian dining excitement.

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON



Farfalla is that cute little pasta we call bow tie. The Italian name is more imaginative; farfalla means butterfly. Although at Ristorante Farfalla there's no worry about enjoying fresh, true Italian flavors, you can have butterflies — with champagne cream sauce, caviar and salmon — in your stomach. Or pappardelle, risotto, gnocchi, veal, salmon, steak ... you get the idea.

Butterflies flutter in suspended animation around the smartly detailed modern dining room at Farfalla, with its display kitchen and earth tones. Celebrating its eighth season as a well-kept secret in the heart of Estero, Farfalla does Italian with breadth and depth. Its menu lists some 60 dishes, from hot and cold antipasti to pasta, fish, chicken, veal and steak entrées. Then your server tells you about the signature dishes and nightly specials, just in case the voluminous menu didn't give you enough choices to face.

My partner went with two signatures — a Gorgonzola Caesar salad and veal rib chop. I did all the homework, read the whole menu, debated, belabored, and finally narrowed down all the likely candidates to a steamed mussels



VANESSA ROGERS

appetizer and red snapper in parchment.

The New Zealand mussels, plump and plentiful, wallowed in a light, flavorful tomato-spiked broth that made a delicate soup of the dish. Likewise, the preparation of my snapper was simple to complement its freshness. Basil leaves and tomato slices had melted into the fish while it baked (a touch too long, I thought) in its wrapping. Since I thought it imperative to sample the pasta, my server agreed to bring me spaghetti pomodoro instead of the usual scalloped potatoes side (but be warned, the

DINING OUT

chef will not do this when he's busy). It too was a marvel of fine flavors, making me wish I had ordered pasta for the main dish. Next time.

The Gorgonzola salad was extravagant with cheese, but could have benefited from an extra squeeze of lemon in the lush dressing. The rib was presented on a long, elegant bone with a masterfully executed porcini demi-glace that managed to allow the mushroom flavor to blossom forth without interference from salt or beef flavors. My guest raved about the scalloped potatoes, light and nicely seasoned. A sprightly medley of steamed veggie spears tasted fresh.

Beyond the perfection out of the kitchen, small details boosted our experience above expectations. The pepper grinder, for instance, was filled with multi-colored corns. And when I couldn't decide upon a wine, my server brought

PLACE SETTING

Restaurant: Ristorante Farfalla

Hours: Dinner Monday-Saturday

Food: Fine Italian

Atmosphere: Intimate, contemporary, handsomely appointed

Service: Accommodating but a little slow at check time

Price: Appetizers, \$5-\$12;
entrées, \$16-\$27

Address: 21301 Tamiami Trail. S., Estero;
ristorantefarfalla.com

Telephone: 239-495-9912

Reservations: Yes

Children's Menu: No

Bar Service: Beer and wine

samples of the Allegrini Valpolicella Classico and Ruffino Chianti Classico Riserva Ducale offered among the selection of 17 wines by the glass. Because the wine servings are enormous, this was very thoughtful. In the end, we settled upon one of our old favorites, La Crema Pinot Noir.

We were going to split a dessert, but were both too set on our wants to compromise, so we tucked into the night's special, a pyramid of chocolate mousse — delicate, with a caramel center — and the winner in the dessert department, the ricotta cheesecake — airy and so Italian. And that's how we ended up going home with much more in our stomachs than butterflies. *NI*

For her restaurant reviews, Chelle Koster Walton dines anonymously and at the expense of Naples Illustrated.