

PERFECT FOR DATE NIGHT

WHEN I WAS A WEE LASS just nine years of age, my parents took us to the Middle East for a family vacation. Our first stop was Egypt, where we rode camels, explored pyramids and, along a dusty road somewhere between Memphis and Sakkara, ate the best rotisserie chicken I've ever tasted. It might have been the first moment I became aware that all chickens are not created equal and that dining can border on a religious experience. Thus, I was not surprised to discover that the chef responsible for the delicious Italian food we sampled at Ristorante Farfalla in Estero, Michael Fattah, hails from Alexandria, Egypt.

The first thing you become aware of at **Ristorante Farfalla** is the butterflies. Butterfly art adorns every wall, which makes sense when you learn that *farfalla* means "butterfly" in Italian. We were escorted to our table and apprised of the day's specials, one of which stole my heart: crab ravioli (\$25). Tom was equally smitten with a menu staple, the *linguini ai frutti di mare* (linguini and seafood, \$24). For good measure, we decided to try a third entrée, the *petto di pollo all'ortolana* (sautéed chicken breast with mushrooms, artichoke hearts and white wine sauce, \$20). We began with a plate of crisp, light *calamari fritti* (fried squid, \$10) and the *insalata tre colori* (three-color salad, \$8) with balsamic vinaigrette.

As a new mother with almost no time for walks on the beach and candlelit dinners, I have begun to regard our review outings as a kind of *Gulfshore Life*-sponsored "date night." In that spirit, I was just getting ready to take Tom's hand and nibble on it when he turned to the couple at the next table and said, "How's the salmon?" What ensued was a lovely, half-hour-long conversation with George and Susan from Worcester, Mass.



VANESSA ROGERS '12

Bounty from the sea: Ristorante Farfalla's cioppino (above) is filled with Ocean Garden shrimp, clams, swordfish and crab in a garlic and fresh plum-tomato sauce; Italian cheesecake (right) made with ricotta and Galbani mascarpone, fresh vanilla beans, lemon and orange zest.

"We always come here for our first Florida meal of the season," George said. "We just drop off our luggage and drive right over. In six years, we've never had a bad meal." Another great tip from George and Susan? He calls her "Swambo," an acronym for She Who Must Be Obeyed.

We quickly saw that we couldn't go wrong with Farfalla's cuisine. My crab ravioli were fresh and homemade, phenomenal; Tom's linguini came adorned with a delicious lobster tail; and our shared chicken had been pounded to an extraordinarily thin, tender cutlet.

We topped off the meal with a tasty crème brûlée (\$7) and delicious coconut sorbetto (\$8). We had some difficulty procuring the check and leaving—the service



was knowledgeable and pleasant, albeit not the most attentive—but we made our way into the night well satisfied. We even held hands. Hooray for date night!

Ristorante Farfalla, 21301 Tamiami Trail S., Estero; (239) 495-9912, www.ristorantefarfalla.com. Dinner Sunday through Thursday from 5–10 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 5–10:30 p.m. Reservations recommended. Free parking. Credit cards accepted. Wheelchair accessible. ♣