



# Restaurant Review

*Bravo to Brio: Real Italian Treats*

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**H**AVING RE-VISITED MY ARTICLES for the past several years, I noticed that I generally inserted negative undertones to chain or franchise restaurant reviews. I suppose that I am a victim of my own naiveté. I believe that stock recipes in a cookie-cutter decorated restaurant, with a talented but formulaically trained wait staff, cannot be great.

I was and am, quite simply, wrong. While many such restaurants really disappoint, there are some that pleasantly surprise. A case in point is this month's delightful eatery: Brio Tuscan Grille, with many restaurants around this nation, including one right here in Boca Raton (5050 Town Center Cir #239 at The Shops at Boca Center, 561-392-3777).

When we entered the restaurant, I bumped into an old friend, Steve, who is and should be climbing the management ladder. He promptly seated us in a quiet spot (the restaurant is quite large, so quiet is relative). Next, Jenny, one of the most gracious and professional wait persons we have ever encountered, took command of arranging an ideally timed food delivery, with one



perfect dish following another at just the right pace to allow for an enjoyable, non-rushed dinner that gave us time for conversation and comfortable dining.

We began with "primi" (first – duh) and experienced an array of rich but light appetizers: roasted garlic, spinach and artichoke dip, served bubbling hot with Parmesan flatbread. Next up was the chicken and chorizo-stuffed peppers, baby bell peppers stuffed with chicken, chorizo, Parmigiano-Reggiano and topped with Fontina and pesto breadcrumbs, baked until golden brown. Finally, I loved the spicy shrimp with eggplant, pan-seared shrimp in a black pepper cream sauce over Romano-crust eggplant.

Forgetting the fact that I could stand to lose thirty pounds, I "forced" myself to sample some truly exquisite bruschettas and flatbread. We had bruschetta quattro, which is a taste of four of the bruschettas, all house-made, and then we jumped into the full orders of roasted red pepper bruschetta with fresh basil, Parmigiano-Reggiano and a balsamic drizzle, then roasted tomato and ricotta bruschetta, with fresh basil and a balsamic drizzle, and margherita flatbread made with fresh mozzarella, vine-ripened tomatoes and fresh basil. But my absolute favorites were blackened shrimp and chorizo flatbread made with smoked gouda, basil pesto, green onions, roasted pepper relish and fresh cilantro, and sausage, pepperoni and ricotta flatbread, which is topped with fresh mozzarella and house-made tomato sauce.

The reason I'm listing many more items than usual is that I truly enjoyed these dishes. I'm trying to convey my comfort level by encouraging you to feel confident eating any of the many wonderful creations appearing throughout this extensive menu.

Some other excellent choices are: lasagna Bolognese al forno, oven-baked and layered with authentic Bolognese

meat sauce, alfredo, ricotta and mozzarella, or (in my case, AND) chicken Milanese, which is crispy Romano chicken with herb pasta, fresh mozzarella and house-made pomodoro sauce. I love shrimp, so, of course, I had seared shrimp risotto served with fresh basil, peperonata, fire-roasted tomatoes and a pesto drizzle, and grilled shrimp and orzo, which are spicy jumbo shrimp served with orzo, grilled asparagus, zucchini, tomatoes and lemon vinaigrette.

One house specialty is Brio crab and shrimp cakes, which are lump crab and Gulf shrimp cakes with roasted vegetables and creamy horseradish. It should be a specialty, as it was marvelous.

We had a phenomenal meat course of beef and veal where each bite was tender, moist and quite succulent. Try the artichoke-crust beef medallions or beef medallions with shrimp scampi. The chicken under the brick, grilled salmon and roasted lamb chops artistically represented the chicken, salmon and lamb dishes.

Here's a rather humble admission from the managers: Brio uses quality, but commercial, pastas. Their strategy is to buy what is best and then to prepare it in a unique way. Homemade pastas could be as good, but if prepared incorrectly or topped with inferior products, it's a waste. On the other hand, top-quality, store-bought pasta that is handled as a delicacy will always be wonderful. At



Brio, all the pastas were so good that I didn't believe their pedigree, at first.

We closed out our evening with an array of conscience-considerate desserts (portion-controlled), plus one absolutely NOT portion-controlled chocolate cake and some rich and satisfying coffees. Brio is a local place with real Italian treats serving hungry people in a very happy, bright atmosphere. The prices are very reasonable and the parking is easy. I know this will be a regular dining spot for all of us. ☀

