



LA VIA RISTORANTE & BAR

Dedicated to Perfection

By Charles Marcanetti

'Dedicated to perfection' sounds like some automobile advertisement. But, truth be told, there is now an Italian restaurant that deserves that logo. One telling reason turns on a simple story. When La Via Ristorante & Bar, located at 4443 Lyons Road at the Promenade in Coconut Creek (954-601-1234), determined to open a very customer friendly, casual atmosphere eatery, where the drinks were large and delicious and the food was unbeatable and affordable, they were also determined to make the best pasta imaginable. Let me give you some figures: you and I can buy a pound of pasta from 75 cents a pound (store brands, on sale) to approximately \$2 a pound (exclusive imported). It would likely cost us 25 cents per pound to make our own, not counting the cost of a pasta machine (you know, the one you couldn't live without that now gathers dust on the ledge above the kitchen cabinet), the time to make it, and the mess – oh, the mess! So off to Italy they went in search of a commercial pasta machine that met American quality control standards (UL Listed). Alas, none having any durability fit the requirement. So, back to the good old US of A and \$40,000.00 later, an incredible machine was delivered to a specially built room in a beautifully designed meeting place and destination, where part of your dining experience can be marveling at it through the

viewing window (it has a capacity to churn out up to 200 pounds of pasta per day). If these people do not sell their pasta in the retail marketplace, they are certifiably crazy (of course, paying that much for a pasta machine may pre-qualify them for that category). Taste the pastas ... without the sauces, which are arguably marketable in and of themselves, and you'll understand why I just used half of my review space to talk about a machine and unsauced pasta.

Let me mention that the ownership has no experience in gourmet Italian cooking ... oh, wait, I'm wrong ... they're none other than the former owner of Casa D'Angelo (Boca Raton) and current owner of Sette Bello (Ft. Lauderdale), both legends in the South Florida demographic. OK, so why open a business in Coconut Creek and not Las Olas or South Beach? Because they live here and wanted to create a neighborhood destination and a place for them to hang out in as well. Let me introduce them as they expressed themselves: our host for the evening was Faith Mauro, a founding partner with past restaurants in New York, New Jersey, and Ft. Lauderdale. Faith has been satisfying patrons for over 30 years. Faith's attention to service has awarded her top honors from magazines, newspapers, and numerous media outlets. Her

husband, our co-host for the evening and, I may add, my source for the pasta machine story, Salvatore Mauro who, as former owner of Casa D'Angelo, and with over 20 years of experience, has received numerous awards from wine selection to impeccable service, now brings his experience and dedication to La Via for an unforgettable evening. The third member of this super-group is Chef/Co-Owner Franco Filiponne, who, as I mentioned above, still owns and operates Sette Bello (Ft. Lauderdale). Franco has been featured as celebrity chef for bands, such as the Moody Blues, Roger Daltrey of The Who, and Tesla to name a few. He has also been featured as guest chef on board the MSC cruise line. Constantly receiving grand reviews from *Zagat*, *Open Table*, *Wine Spectator* and awarded the coveted '5 Star Diamond Award,' he now receives his highest award - my praises and compliments. Rounding out this powerhouse team is Rita Filippone who has over 20 years of experience in the restaurant business, with restaurants in upstate New York and South Florida. Rita has earned top honors for her innovative mixology, and the perfection of the drinks served at La Via clearly reflects her expertise.

We started with La Via Salad - tri-colored salad with portobello mushrooms, fresh mozzarella, and tomatoes, drizzled with sundried tomato vinaigrette; it was a great beginning. Of the many things we sampled and the things I would have over and over again, the best of the best is Faith's Shrimp which are breaded shrimp, pan fried and topped with a garlic sauce, served over spinach. I seldom eat fried shrimp as the frying generally dries out the shrimp and the breading usually makes the shrimp 'dusty.' At La Via, the reverse is true. The shrimp was moist, sweet and flavorful, and the breading was outstandingly softly crunchy (I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but when you try it, you'll agree). We next had Bianca's Meatballs which is blended beef, veal and pork, oven-baked with pomodoro sauce over fresh ricotta cheese. The pizza is Italian pizza, not American pizza. Translate that as thin, crisp and perfectly balanced, as opposed to a loaf of bread with tomato sauce and cheese. I've already mentioned that La Via's pastas are unbeatable and, when topped with La Via's near-perfect sauces, astound the palate. Try these: Penne Bolognese, chef's

famous meat sauce with penne pasta covered with melted mozzarella; Sofia's Vongole, Little Neck clams simmered in a garlic wine broth with linguini pasta; Tagliatelle Alfredo, white cheese cream sauce; Pesto Pasta topped with ricotta salata; and Gnocchi, potato dumplings served with pomodoro sauce and fresh mozzarella.

While I had no desire to eat any main courses, as the pastas were so satisfying, I felt compelled (google 'gourmand') to 'just taste' the Chicken Parmesan, served with a side of pasta, and Chicken Milanese, grilled and topped with balsamic vinaigrette and parmesan cheese. I also loved Rita's Signature Steak, a 12-ounce NY strip perfectly grilled (medium rare for me), served with polenta sticks and topped with flash-fried onions, and the Rack of Lamb, grilled and served with vegetables and potato croque with a mint glaze. Let me add one 'special' which I never review, but is served frequently enough at La Via to mention. The Veal Chop, served exactly as I ordered it, was sweet, tender and just peppery enough to really bring out the subtlety of the soft meat.

As expected, the desserts and coffees were a relaxing end to an evening filled with great stories, great food, great drinks and a great atmosphere. I can definitely be expected to return soon. 🍷

