

By Charles Marcanetti

PICCOLO RISTORANTE

More than Just another Italian Restaurant

Just to prepare you for this review, I will start out with my conclusion: Piccolo Ristorante is the finest Italian restaurant I have eaten at in more than 20 years. The real problem is calling this gorgeous, soft, mood inducing work of culinary environmental art "Italian."

There are no hero sandwiches, veal parmigiana, chicken parmigiana, or shrimp parmigiana... not here, not now, not ever. There are no garlic knots placed on your paper cloth covered table with the hope of filling you up before getting some mediocre, pre-cooked, once frozen this or that. There is no loud music or stale air. On the contrary, there is perfection in presentation of food, as well as décor, though not necessarily Italian, music. The temperature is cool, but not remotely as cool as Piccolo is on your palate, in your stomach, and on your soul. It is not classy to say something is classy, but if I could say it, I most certainly would. Piccolo will be on my list of Best Reviewed Restaurants of 2015. About that I have no doubt.

Piccolo Ristorante seats 30 to 35 guests, and no one goes there to get a bite to eat. Everyone goes there (and there are plenty of everyones) to dine, to enjoy fabulous wines and to luxuriate in Haute Cuisine without the haute



prices... in gourmet dishes that will absolutely leave you wondering if you've ever eaten Italian food before. Designed, developed, and offered as a complete dining experience by Owner/Chef Andres Avayu and Owner/Hostess, Alison Avayu, Piccolo is aptly named as reflecting a small musical instrument. It means small, but this restaurant is *gigante*.

I'd like to share a short Piccolo story: There are very few people whose opinions I hold extremely high, especially in "my" world of reviewing restaurants. However, my friends Tony and Jenny are two such people. When we are not dining together, we are seeking new locations to bring each other to. One weekday afternoon, the three of us were enjoying oysters and wings. Almost in unison, we said "I have a new place for you." I asked Tony where it was. He said



SHRIMP AGLIO E OLIO



TOP: VEAL CHOP ABOVE: CRAB CAKES

Fort Lauderdale. I asked what type of food. He said, "Italian, but not really." I freaked out because when he said "not really," I knew he was talking about Piccolo. Being the coward I am, I said that I'd count to three and we'd both say the name at the same time. One, two and three... "PICCOLO!"

I thought my wife, Maria, called them and set me up. They denied it and then described their meal, the ambiance, the owners, Alison and Andres. We knew we had each "discovered" this new landmark. Tony said that he was so moved by this place that for the first time in his life, he introduced himself and Jenny to Andres and Alison. He told them that they had a friend who is a restaurant critic and that they put in a recommendation for Piccolo. Dear



GNOCCHI

towers above the competition, especially the appetizer Crab Cake Tower consisting of jumbo lump crab cake, avocado relish, tomato chive gazpacho, and the Antipasto which is assorted Italian cured meats and cheeses. But even shining brighter among these stars, is the homemade Potato Gnocchi made with a four cheese cream sauce, poached pears, and nutmeg. It is served al dente and will astound you. The pasta dishes are fabulous as entrees or shared to complement other entrees. Among these fantastic assortments are the Lemon Asparagus Risotto made with creamy Arborio, preserved lemon, char-grilled asparagus, and the Shrimp Aglio e Olio consisting of jumbo shrimp, shaved garlic, extra virgin olive oil, basil, and wheat



CARPACCIO

spaghetti al Nero di Seppia. You may know that mushrooms are a surprisingly good source of Vitamin D, so that is an excuse to try Linguini al Funghi made with them, black truffle oil, shaved garlic, and extra virgin olive oil. I never would have guessed that mushrooms were a health food. I certainly didn't consider that in the Sixties.

I didn't mention the Chianti Braised Short Ribs house specialty because I want to mention all of Piccolo's meats together: the short ribs are faultless, made with creamy sun-dried tomato polenta. In fact, Tony loved them. I inhaled the Grilled Veal Chop prepared bone-in with white truffle porcini risotto. Jack had the



CREME BRULEE

Filet Mignon, broiled in with home-made red wine demi-glace and served with roasted tri color potatoes. He didn't want to share it. At least I made him give me a little so I could "do my job."

The desserts are homemade. So, the gelatos, the sorbets and the pastries are unique. They live up to the incredibly high standards that Piccolo Ristorante sets. Finally, there is one very sad part to this adventure, leaving. 📍

Piccolo Ristorante is located at 2826 E Commercial Blvd, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33308 (call 954.776.8066, go to website piccoloff.com, or contact Open Table for reservations).