

Dining A La King: The Cataldos have a sweet win in PerBacco

Published: Monday, May 09, 2011 -- The Truth, A

Last updated: 5/9/2011 12:03:06 AM

By [Marshall King](#)

Truth Staff

Let's begin at dessert.

At PerBacco recently, the sweet offerings to end the meal included something the server called "affogato."

It's an Italian dessert. Bruno and Marisa Cataldo didn't invent it for their menu at the restaurant on the west side of Elkhart. But the scoop of vanilla ice cream doused with espresso and, in this case, Frangelico liqueur, is rich, yet light and smooth. And shows that this couple knows how to put something good on a table.



I've long said Marisa is one of the best cooks in Elkhart. The Italian native has been in the restaurant business here since marrying Bruno in 1986. Her Italian food is simple and rustic. And very good.

Bruno is a no-nonsense restaurateur who's been in the restaurant business since June 1, 1979. He worked with his father, Antonio, and brother, Paul, on Goshen Avenue. A fire there launched them on separate paths. Paul operates Antonio's and Bruno went elsewhere and 11 years ago landed on the other side of town at 28046 C.R. 16 W., just west of S.R 19, where Indiana Avenue becomes the county road.

Bruno is best known for making pizza and gets notoriety because of confusion. The Bruno's Pizza locations in St. Joseph County and Nappanee are operated by an uncle and cousins. He had a small franchise of his own with locations in Goshen and Middlebury, but all of those are gone and the only Bruno's he operates is next to PerBacco.



After a failed attempt to open a restaurant with another family member, Bruno and Marisa opened Mezza Luna, but closed it three or four years ago.

But Bruno and Marisa aren't happy just making pizza and sandwiches. They purchased the building and decided to open PerBacco.

It's a sit-down restaurant where the tablecloths make some people wonder if it's too fancy for them or if they can get a quick bite, Bruno said.

It's not. It's just a nice place with hearty, Mediterranean food.

"They want dinner in 10 minutes. It's not possible," Bruno said.

Because Marisa is in the kitchen cooking from scratch. They considered bringing in a chef, but opted to just let her cook and steer the menu. I think it was the right choice.

They make the fettucine and cheese-filled ravioli. They get butternut squash ravioli from a small supplier in Chicago who makes it for them.



The menu isn't massive, but has plenty of winners and daily specials are often offered. A grouper special sells well and will soon be on the menu. Marisa is preparing it with a light wine sauce, peppers and yellow roasted tomatoes. When they offer a pork chop with onions, peppers, olives, capers and a red wine sauce, it's popular as well.

I haven't had either, but the salmon in a lemon butter sauce with artichokes (\$16.95) is good and the rigatoni alla vodka (\$13.95) is rich.

Marisa prepared the eggplant parmesan special (\$14.95) as a lasagna, layering slices that had been sautéed in flour. The result had good flavor, but I wanted a bit more crispness.



They make their own sauces and soups. The Italian wedding soup I got had a lot of the mini meatballs and little broth. PerBacco's sauces are perhaps the key to this place. The walnut cream sauce they put on the squash ravioli is stellar. The tomato sauce is straightforward, hearty tomato sauce. Nothing fancy. Just good.

The menu, like Antonio's, has a nod to the late Tony Russo. Before his death, he ordered pasta a la ribiata, Bruno said. It was mostaccioli with tomato sauce, garlic, parsley, hot pepper butter and parmesan cheese. Other customers couldn't say "a la ribiata" and just ordered the Tony Russo. Antonio's has it on the menu as a pizza.

The Cataldos opened a new restaurant alongside their pizza place, though you can now also order pizza in the dining room.

PerBacco's service isn't stellar yet, but it's coming along. The food is good and has a few twists that make it unique in Elkhart.

These experienced restaurateurs keep making and selling good food. They even missed the birth of their first granddaughter, Natalia, on Dec. 11 because of a party at the restaurant. She wasn't expected to live long because of health problems, but is at home with them. And they keep working.



"It was not easy, opening here and being in this situation," Marisa said.

But it's what they do. And they do it well.

QUICK BITES

* McCarthy's on the Riverwalk, 333 NIBCO Parkway, Elkhart, is having a wine dinner Saturday evening. The four-course meal is \$55 per person, according to Rochelle Gubi-Maddux of the restaurant. Information/reservations: 293-2830.

* A number of weeks ago a reader asked about Swiss steak. Reader Teresa M. responded to say that Hopper's in Goshen also has "a very nice Swiss steak" with mashed potatoes and green beans for \$4.99.

* Ruth's Chris Steak House, 902 E. University, Mishawaka, is doing Give Back Monday and will give 10 percent of the cost of a special menu item to Center for the Homeless, according to a press release.

* The South Bend chapter of the American Culinary Federation was one of six in its region to receive an outstanding achievement award at a conference in New Orleans in April.

Marshall V. King is news/multimedia editor and food columnist for The Elkhart Truth/eTruth.com. You can reach him at mking@etruth.com; 296-5805 or on Twitter @hungrymarshall.

IF YOU GO

What: PerBacco Ristorante Italiano

Where: 28046 C.R. 16 W. (just west of S.R. 19 along what is Indiana Avenue on the west side of Elkhart)

Fare: southern Italian

Hours: 4 to 9 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday, 4 to 10 Friday and Saturday, 4 to 9 Sunday

Details: Reservations accepted; no smoking; handicapped accessible; large parties and private events accepted; carry-out available.

Phone: 226-0838

Story Link: <http://www.etruth.com/Know/News/Story.aspx?id=541710>

© Copyright 2011 Truth Publishing Co.