

AS SEEN IN

the

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## Mario Ristorante Italiano and Wine Bar

By Charles Marcanetti



There is now a truly great Italian restaurant in this area. That is Parkland, Coconut Creek, Coral Springs and Margate. No kidding...no hyperbole...no puffing! Just the truth. Mario Ristorante Italiano and Wine Bar located in Regency Lakes Village at 6370 N. State Road 7 (that's 441 to the rest of us) in Coconut Creek may be called at 954-420-3100, for directions or dinner reservations for parties of six or more (Mario will open for lunch for special occasions). Mario and his wife Nadia, who work side-by-side, are experienced chefs and restaurant managers who relocated to Regency Lakes about one month ago by opening this magnificent eatery, destined to become "the" place to dine (notice I didn't say "eat" because this experience is so special it will, and you will want it to, occupy your evening). Sure you can order, eat and run more quickly, but with the perfect service, the perfect wine list, the perfect décor, the perfect ambiance, and the absolutely most delicious, reasonably priced masterpieces of food creations, why would anyone want to leave?

You know me; I try to find something good to say about every restaurant I review (the real clunkers aren't reviewed at all; usually about six restaurants are rejected for every one accepted for review). Sometimes I struggle, a little. Not here. Mario Ristorante Italiano is as near perfect a restaurant as anyone can get. For starters, the bread is homemade, served hot with garlic glaze or a light bruschetta topping. It has a toasted crust and steamy soft interior that screams to be eaten. The appetizers of Antipasto Della Casa (\$15.00 for two people) — consisting of layers of marinated Portobello mushrooms, imported Bufala mozzarella, sautéed red roasted peppers and a taste of Mario's caponata, imported Sopressata and Prosciutto di Parma, served with diced Parmigiano Reggiano (12 years old) and calamata olives, — or somewhat smaller, the Mozzarella Caprese (\$9.00 for one person) — which is the same imported mozzarella di Bufala as in the Antipasto Della Casa, sitting atop sweet, juicy Beefsteak Tomatoes served with giant fresh basil leaves drizzled with aged balsamic vinaigrette and served with homemade Crostini bread — will each knock your socks off. Not only is every ingredient fresh and each of the portions overly generous, but also the imported Bufala mozzarella is far and away the best anyone can find anywhere in South Florida. The Broccoli Rabe (pronounced "rob") (\$12.00), though seasonal, is worth asking for each time you go there. Drenched in a mild garlic and olive oil topped with the ridiculously delicious melted Bufala mozzarella, it is unequalled anywhere.

We sampled the Orecchiette (little ears) Con Sugo D'Agnello (\$17.00). I'm almost tempted not to tell you what the sauce is so that you don't try to make it at home. But, very simply put, it is a ragu sauce (not the

brand name, but the style) heavily combined with ground New Zealand lamb (there are more sheep in New Zealand than people, for all you Jeopardy! lovers). It is so delicious that my wife wouldn't give it up and Maria never eats pasta. She devoured it and we had to order our own serving. We also had the Snapper Limoncello (\$22.00) which is a Key West (and therefore the sweetest) Red Snapper fillet sautéed in white wine, butter and Limoncello sauce. This light, and not fishy, fish dish should be used as the standard by which other similar dishes are judged. No one would get close...not in Broward County or Palm Beach County, maybe not in Florida (or even Key West).

The best however, I saved for last. You all know I shy away from veal — because I am opposed to the way the calves are raised. I often say that I only eat it when it is a signature dish and without which there can be no fair review. So, Mario strongly encouraged me to try his Veal Chop Alla Mario (\$32.00). I have eaten veal around the world. I have eaten veal across this great nation and in Europe including Italy, Ireland, Spain, England, Germany and Switzerland. Nowhere have I eaten a perfectly prepared veal chop with the finest and best balanced sauce ever prepared other than in Mario Ristorante Italiano, Coconut Creek, FL.

Again my dear friends, that's not hyperbole. It is my honest opinion and I'd love to hear yours. Anyway, the veal chop is prepared to your taste and grilled to perfection, then finished with imported Porcini mushrooms, shallot onions, and Port wine sauce. You will be talking about this dish to friends and neighbors for days to come.

Now on to the desserts. Oh, the desserts! We had the finest Tiramisu (\$6.50) outside Little Italy, NYC. It is double layers of lady fingers in a rich mascarpone espresso and amaretto cream. Mario says it is a signature dessert. It is a remarkably light, airy, and heavenly sweet confection aimed at "picking you up"; and it does, and it will. The Authentic Sicilian Cannoli (\$6.50) is far and away the only true cannoli I've had since leaving NYC. No other cannoli can compare. We also had the Flute of Limoncello (\$6.50) which is a refreshing lemon gelato swirled together with Limoncello and presented in a champagne glass. It was light and fun. It cleared the palate and left us feeling mellow. On the other delicious hand, we finished with the Chocolate Lava Soufflé (\$6.50) which is a rich and warm chocolate cake, sided with vanilla ice cream.

Wow!

Our waiter for the evening was Gian Carlo, who not only knew each dish; he loved serving each dish because he knew how we would react. He also knew the extensive wine list, which brings me to yet another very strong recommendation: please do yourselves a favor and order the dry, but not so dry, Chianti Classico 2004 Castello D'Albola. It is a delicious wine that you will find is perfect for these Italian meat dishes. And, by the way, there is absolutely no rule that says, "order white wine with fish and red wine with meat." Nor is there a rule that says "you must serve red wine at room temperature and white wine chilled." Please, drink wine however you enjoy it. True oenophiles will not look askance at you and you should be happy with whatever turns you on. (Once, while I was living in France I actually saw Frenchmen putting ice in the red wine...what surprised me was not that they did it, but that they had ice.)

Our hostess for the evening was the lovely Ciarra and the wonderful evening was smoothly paced thanks to the aid of David Dinnerstein. Thanks to all of you for making us feel right at home and take it from me, "be prepared", you've helped Mario and Nadia create a destination and a landmark at Regency Lakes Village Center.

Directions: If you're coming north from Sample on 441 look for the Shell Station and Walgreen's on your right less than a mile past the Sawgrass entrance/exit. If you're coming south from Hillsboro on 441 turn left onto Regency Lakes Blvd at the light by McDonald's just South of Johnson/Holmberg Rd. from either direction, after you turn in, it's the new back Plaza. Enjoy. I know you will.

Our food editor, Charles Marcanetti can be contacted at [marcanetti@theparklander.com](mailto:marcanetti@theparklander.com).

