

AS SEEN IN

the

# Parklander

AUGUST 2008

## Pete's

By Charles Marcanetti

## Café Bella Sera

A few months ago some friends invited me and my wife Maria out to dinner. They claimed to have “discovered” far and away the best Italian restaurant in ALL of Florida. This was a mighty boast coming from humble people. Sure, they run a successful business (AC No Sweat, a great, honest and prompt air conditioning company – all right it’s a free plug, so what). But, this was my area of expertise and I do the “discovering”. However, it was precisely because these people are so unaffected by the “in vogues” and “hip” and “today” trends that my curiosity was piqued. Keep in mind we would’ve gone under any conditions, but the acclaim was too much for my ego. So we went.

I did not intend on ever reviewing this place as my schedule is quite full for months on end. I intended to enjoy the evening with wonderful people and that was it.

The bread arrived. The garlic and oil dip arrived. I was a goner.

So, I changed my review schedule and returned, pen in hand, to memorialize my experience at Pete’s Café Bella Sera located at 7351 North State Road 7, in Parkland (954-346-7373).

In the past year I have given my highest accolades to two Italian restaurants in this Quinti—City area (Parkland, Margate, Coconut Creek, Coral Springs and Boca Raton).

But, Pete’s Café Bella Sera is in a class by itself. It is so far in a class by itself that I’ve created a new category of excellence. Whereas the best of the best has been reserved for restaurants that provide quality, portion-size, ambiance, wine list diversity, service, and character, we now add balance of the elements and dining impact to the mix and arrive at the highest ranking, now just above “fine dining”, and call it a “fine dining experience.”

If an owner, here it’s Pete Lombard, Jr., takes extreme care to have only the highest and best trained wait personnel, one can only imagine the abilities and professionalism of the Chefs and food preparers. So, I’ll rave about our waiter for the evening, Anthony Sacco. Nowhere in Florida have I seen a genuine textbook perfect service...from the left for delivery, right for removal...ladies first...present but never imposing...well-informed but not puffed up, to the decanting of the wine and offering of bottled or tap water. It was perfect, flawless, and a ballet/opera/concert and rock festival rolled into one.

Of course you all know I ordered a Barolo. I chose a 2003 Marchesi di Barolo. It was decanted and remained for approximately 20 minutes before I tasted a smooth, crisp wine with great legs and a bouquet permeating the atmosphere around us. Good Barolos are never cheap, but for the best of Italian wine, any price is reasonable. At Pete’s Café Bella Sera it was priced competitively. We also sampled the French Martini which, because Café Bella Sera obviously perfected it, should be renamed the Italian Martini.

I opened this review with the bread and olive/garlic dip. So let me be clear that the bread was crunchy, warm and meaty, and was served with the exact ratio of olive oil to garlic, and quickly became what we all wanted it to be, a meal unto itself. However, and once again, I was forced to move on to the “real” food.

In order to introduce you to the fabulous world of true gourmet food let me be so bold as to pose and then answer my own question. How does one charge \$29.00 for a plate of pasta and have the customer think he is getting the better of the deal? Simple, let the pasta be Pete’s Café Bella Sera’s Pasta Bolognese. This creative masterpiece is made by perfectly balancing a combination of N.Y. Strip Steak, Filet Mignon, Italian Sausage, Ground Beef, Ground Veal, and Merlot Wine, then simmering them ever so slowly in a Fresh Plum Tomato Sauce. It’s actually not a plate but a major dish of pasta with mounds of this remarkable delicacy piled on top. You’ll agree that it is inexpensive for what you get.

Anyway, let’s start at the very beginning (a very good place to start) and describe the appetizers we sampled. An absolute must at this world class eatery are two Artichoke dishes. The Baby Artichokes (\$14.00) cooked with garlic, olive oil and breadcrumbs, as well as the Large Stuffed Artichoke (\$16.00) cooked with Breadcrumbs, Romano Cheese, Capers, Garlic and Olive Oil in a Chicken Broth are culinary showpieces. Do not miss these greats.

The Baked Clams Oreganata (\$12.00/dozen) was perfectly seasoned, crisp, and soft at the same time—hard to do, virtually impossible to beat. The Cold Antipasto (\$13.00 per person) blends Stuffed Peppers, Roasted Peppers, Fresh Mozzarella, Prosciutto, Tomato and Onion with Kalamata Olives, Auricchio Provolone Cheese and Sopressata. We just wanted to keep eating and eating. Who am I kidding...we did keep eating and eating.

Next we had two of Pete’s Famous Meatballs (\$16.00). Without further comment, let’s just say they’re perfect, they can’t be improved and people who dare to say they make the best meatballs simply haven’t tried Pete’s.

Oh, we didn’t want to leave the cold antipasto all alone so we tried the Hot Seafood Antipasto Oreganata (\$17.00 per person), which consists of Shrimp, Scallops, Mussels, Clams and Fried Calamari (Squid) with Scungilli (Conch) Marinara. Fabulous!

As if I wasn’t already exploding, we decided to try the Tri-Colored Tomato and Fresh Mozzarella Salad, which consists of Red, Green and Yellow Tomatoes, Marinated in Fresh Olive Oil and Garlic with Fresh Baby Mozzarella and Topped with Balsamic Vinegar. It was soft and sweet with a hint of tartness to keep your mouth watering.

So, now we delved into the mysteries of three groups of main courses; the veal, the chicken, and the fish. Destined to go down in the annals of restaurant lore comes the finest and most delicate veal dish ever created. The Veal Chop Milanese (\$42.00) with Arugula and Reggiano Cheese is butterflyed and topped in a way that leaves the meat tenderer and moister than anyone can imagine. The Chicken Ripieno (\$26.00) is a Boneless Chicken Breast stuffed (and I mean stuffed) with Prosciutto, Spinach, Mozzarella Cheese and Kalamata Olives in a White Wine Mushroom Sauce. It is a giant portion, as are all of Pete’s dishes, and will truly satisfy any chicken lover. The final entrée was Fresh Yellow Tail Snapper Oreganata (market price as fish catches and sizes vary day-to-day). The fish was buttery soft and sweet, garlicky and creamy. The best word to describe it is “succulent.”

Our gluttonous evening ended with dessert and coffee. The desserts we had were the Carrot Cake, the Chocolate Cake (huge), Pete’s grandmother’s recipe Ricotta Cheese Cake, and the Chocolate Mousse and Cannoli.

Even though this is the first restaurant to make the ultimate list of perfect eateries and a true “fine dining experience”, there is one thing askew about the name: the word café is French and the Italian equivalent is caffè. I wonder what Pete had in mind? Anyway, it’s a truly great restaurant and I know you’ll agree so let me hear from you. E-mail me...I’ll even answer. I hope...no, I know you’ll enjoy and love and marvel at this diamond mine in Parkland.

Pete’s Café Bella Sera

954-346-7373

7351 N. State Road 7, Parkland, FL 33073 | www.petescabellaser.com

Hours of Operation: Lunch: Monday-Friday 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. | Dinner: Tuesday-Friday 5 p.m.-10 p.m. | Saturday-Sunday 5 p.m.-2 a.m.