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Locanda Positano - simple food, quality ingredients ... and 'famiglia'

By Pippa Fisher



From left, Mimmo (Pizza chef), Renato Lopez (partner), Enzo Rosano (owner), and Raffaele Espisito pose outside the new restaurant. Photos Pippa Fisher

In downtown Lafayette great restaurants are literally right around every corner and yet the city's newest eatery looks set to fill its own unique spot.

Locanda Positano, an authentic Italian restaurant, has gone into the old Artisan Bistro property on Brown Street. Its appeal is clear as soon as you walk past the little Fiat at the entrance to the restaurant.

Owner Enzo Rosano has completely renovated the inside of the small space. Where there used to be multiple rooms and areas, he has knocked down walls. The feel is open, and the décor is clean with crisp blue and yellow accents. The fireplace remains. There are scenes from Rosano's Amalfi Coast home on the walls and a notable blue chandelier in one corner. The full bar has a TV, usually showing soccer.

Outside Rosano has made the old patio into a year-round space, with tables and heaters and, during the colder weather, tent-like sides to the space to retain heat. This makes the area a perfect place to dine with your kids or maybe even bring your dog.

Rosano himself is the youngest of nine children. He and his siblings learned to cook from their mother, "Mamma Carmela." Infused with a love of cooking from a young age, Rosano went to culinary school in Verona. From there he spent time in London, learning English and working as a bartender at Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Vong at the prestigious Berkeley Hotel.

"But my plan was always to come to America," says Rosano. With some basic English under his belt, he came to the states in 1998 and helped open the popular Mezza Luna in Half Moon Bay. Rosano and his brother, Tullio, opened Aqua Pazza in 2006 in San Mateo. In 2011 Locanda Positano opened in San Carlos and in 2015 Locanda Ravello opened in Danville.

Locanda Positano in Lafayette is Rosano's first solo venture.

Viewing the restaurant as an extension of his home, Rosano explains that his philosophy is to treat his customers like personal guests.

And it is a family affair. Many of the recipes come directly from Mamma Carmela who, when she visits from Italy, can be found back in the kitchen creating dishes such as Mamma Carmela's famous meatballs.

It was still crowded at 8 p.m. when this reporter visited. We were shown straight to a table and ordered wine from a menu that includes a large selection of Italian wines, and cocktails including the Positano Royale - a homemade lemoncello with prosecco. We shared an appetizer - the burrata, which was perfect, light and creamy, to enjoy with fresh bread.

I ordered the branzino - Mediterranean sea bass served with cherry tomatoes and white wine with clams and vegetables. It was fresh, bursting with flavor, and light, despite the generous portion size.

We finished with tiramisu, which was melt-in-your-mouth delicious and perfect with a cappuccino.

Diners will most likely be treated to a spontaneous burst of operatic singing by the pizza chef, Mimmo. Incongruous for Lafayette, maybe, but it works somehow.

The candles on each table gave a soft feel to the restaurant. A real mix of age groups were enjoying the food - from older folks, to families with children, a few couples and a group of college students.

Rosano says he aims to welcome all members of the community. He wants people to come back. The ambience is many steps above a basic pizza place but less formal than a "white tablecloth" restaurant. The prices are moderate, with the pasta dishes mostly under \$20, the thin crust pizza \$14 or less and nothing over \$25.

Rosano maintains that the best food is simple food prepared with fresh, high-quality ingredients.

The restaurant is open Tuesday thru Sunday, from 11:30 a.m. until 10 p.m. Reservations can be made through Yelp or by calling (925) 310-4337, but walk-ins are welcome too. Parking is easy and free on the street or in the rear parking lot.



Enzo's favorite branzino, Mediterranean sea bass

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