

Mima Vinoteca, in Irvington

Rustic Rave: This new Main Street favorite makes Italian comfort-food seem downright inspiring.

BY TED MANN_INTOWN WESTCHESTER • APRIL 24, 2008

Restaurants like Mima pose a moral quandary: On the one hand, after your first visit, you want to praise the Irvington gem, talking up its jaw-droppingly delicious food, pitch-perfect service, and fair prices. On the other, you're tempted to keep it a secret, just so everyone and their mother doesn't fill up the reservation book through 2010.

Yes, it's that good. Owned by Robert Leggio, one of the visionaries who kicked off the Yonkers restaurant renaissance with Zuppa, and his cousin John Leggio, Mima Vinoteca opened in January inside a quaint brick-and-dark-wood space on Main Street (formerly home to Red Hat). From the moment you enter, the rustic vibe kicks in—wrought-iron chandeliers, flickering candles, pressed-tin ceilings, and mopinas (heavy, dishtowel-like napkins). With an Italian menu and handmade pasta, it's vaguely reminiscent of Zuppa, only, at 75 seats, much cozier.

For appetizers, our waiter steered us to the formaggi sampler and an arugula salad with fried artichokes. With the former, each of the three cheeses we tried—taleggio, ricotta fresca, and Piave vecchio—was complemented by sides of parsley, date bread, and quince marmalade, respectively. The salad, meanwhile, combined shaved Parmesan, cherry tomatoes, and the still-warm artichokes with a lemony vinaigrette in a way that maximized every single one of the flavors.

It was the entrées, though, that made our meal truly memorable. The trece, a corkscrew-shaped pasta with black pepper, onions, and smoked bacon, came with a farm-fresh egg in the center. By tossing the pasta and mixing in the egg, you create a kind of carbonara sauce—and an excuse for your spouse to filch bites. My favorite, though, was the braised short ribs, with sides of baby carrots, pearl onions, and chestnut-ricotta gnocchi. It still perplexes me just how the chef, Daniel Van Etten, managed to make his meat so supernaturally sweet and soft.

While we're on the topic of tenderness, the bread-pudding dessert—with its little slices, brandied prunes, and vanilla ice cream—was also exceptionally supple (almost the consistency of a panna cotta). In other words, like Mima, it hit both the sweet and soft spots simultaneously. Bull's-eye.