

Amore: love your tastebuds

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Desert Entertainer
November 1, 2006

One of the best things about the former Omri & Boni Restaurant in La Quinta was the mad, modernist steel and glass architecture of that gorgeous dining spot, and it was sad to see it fold. Fortunately, the cutting-edge elegance has been re-opened to us as Amore's, the newest benchmark in elegance, serving the Italian cuisine of Sicily with a bit of a nod to Tuscany and Rome.

Walk into Amore's through its massive, frosted glass door, and you step onto a lighted glass floor, glowing like blue ice. Step around the corner and the dining area opens up like a space ship, high ceilings, angled windows, lighted support stanchions all hover over crisp white linens and upholstered chairs. A big favorite among the country club set, Amore's will make its best impression on you not from what's around you but from what's on the menu.

From the appetizers, salads and soups, to the pasta, seafood and beef, Amore's puts a Sicilian flair into everything they prepare. The Baked Clams Oreganta (\$12) are packed with excellently blended spices as are the white Mussels in marinara or firey fra diavolo (\$11), but even the Seven Spice Crusted Baby Lamb Chops (\$14) with fig essence with dates and almonds will thrill your mouth with a sincere Italian zest. The Wood Oven Roasted Tomato and Rosemary Soup (\$6) has the freshness of a recently raided atrium garden but the heavenly impact of herbs, a hint of cheese, and spices that make any other tomato soup, well, any other tomato soup.

The pasta selections (about 15 specialties) will astound with their variety and generous portions. From the simple garlic and olive oil (Aglio e Olio - \$20) to the Tuscan Rigatoni (\$24) with sausage, white beans and basil in a light chicken broth (\$24), I dare you to say you've tasted these anywhere else. I saw a few Lobster Risotto (\$30) sail past me to eager tables that cheered "Our favorite! The best!"

An amazing array of fish graced the menu - Lake Superior Whitefish Piccata (\$26), Chilean Sea bass Scaloppini (\$30) - but I'm not the man to write you about fish. I went straight for the beef. Grilled Lamb Rib Chops with eggplant caviar and gorgonzola (\$35), Pignoli Crusted Rack of Lamb (\$38), all tempted me to distraction. I settled, however, on the Veal Chop Mollica (\$38), a massive cut of veal chop on the bone, crusted with savory breadcrumbs and cheese and served with a touch of olive oil. OK, I was hungry. The veal was of superior quality, tender as filet mignon, and the crusty breading made the chop a wonderful, juicy delight. Served with mashed potatoes (not too Italian, but oh so good) - this chop rates another try next time I go.

The portions are so generous, I recommend a light appetizer (perhaps share a salad) and might even suggest sharing a side - asparagus (grilled or fried), Broccoli Rabe, Eggplant Parmigiana Sicilian, Escarole (all for under \$9). Share these, if for no other reason, to save room for the Zabaglione - an Italian dessert from Venice made with egg yolks, sugar, a sweet liquor (usually Marsala wine). It is a very light custard, which has been whipped to retain a lot of air - like spooning into a very sweet, heavenly cloud. I recommend it with berries - astounding.

Pricey - a bit, but the attentive service, the stunning atmosphere and, of course, the quality of the cuisine at Amore's makes this place a downright bargain.



Amore Ristorante Italiano
5 to 10 p.m. Tues. thru Sun.
47-474 Washington Street
La Quinta
(760) 777-1315