

Raffaele Ristorante - the wait is finally over

Reviewed by Denise Righetti, October 27, 2011



For those of you who have been patiently waiting for Raffaele to open, I've got good news: the long awaited, much anticipated opening of Raffaele Ristorante in Royal Palm Place has finally arrived! Chef/Owner Raffaele Esposito took his time to see his vision through as he totally transformed the space that had previously been occupied by Argentango into something uniquely his own. This new space is open and airy, decorated in soothing, neutral tones of beige and brown with Italian tile floors and dangling mother of pearl pendant lighting. The large windows and sliding glass door provide an excellent view of the lighted monument tower at night, and a nice selection of music could be heard throughout the restaurant which added to the overall ambiance.

Raffaele, a successful restaurateur in NYC for 20+ years, decided to move to South Florida and bring his culinary expertise with him. His signature dishes are representative of Naples and

Southern Italy and his wine list, primarily comprised of CA and Italian wines, is quite extensive.

I had the pleasure of dining at Raffaele last night and wanted to share with you some of the highlights of the evening. As we entered the restaurant, we approached the hostess stand and were warmly greeted and escorted to a nice private table. Shortly after being seated, our server, Jean, came over to introduce himself, presented us with a wine list and offered to tell us about their appetizer and dinner specials to aid us in deciding what wines we might be interested in selecting. We appreciated that gesture and thought that was a very nice touch. I started out with a lovely glass of Lyeth Pinot Noir, CA (\$12) and my husband chose the Capone Super Tuscan Reserve (\$14). Both were wonderful choices. A basket of assorted freshly baked breads were delivered to our table that had been made in house in their wood-fired oven. We informed Jean that we were interested in trying a number of items and taking the initiative, like a true professional, he had each item brought to our table already split in the back. Impressive.

First up was the Capesante Con Shiitake (\$13) - grilled scallops with leeks, shiitake mushrooms and fresh herbs. The scallops were tender and the white wine reduction was light and flavorful. The shiitake mushrooms were the star of this dish in my opinion.

Next up was the Lenticchie Con Riso (\$10) - Lentil Soup with Italian rice. The lentils were cooked perfectly and this soup was packed with flavor. Next we had the Risotto Con Porcini Ricotta (\$20) - Italian rice with porcini mushroom, ricotta and parmesan. The risotto was hearty and I especially enjoyed the combination of porcini mushrooms, the ricotta, parmesan and the fresh basil that topped the dish.

We selected the Steak Pizzaiola (\$30) for our main entree, one of the specials that Jean had informed us about. The steak was cooked in their wood-fired oven, sliced and delicately placed atop a freshly prepared tomato sauce accompanied by a spinach and cheese encrusted friter (for lack of a better word) which was very unique and very tasty. Lastly, we somehow managed to save room to try two of Raffaele's wonderful desserts: Tiramisu (\$8) - Homemade with ladyfingers, coffee, Kahlua and mascarpone cheese (simply TDF: to die for!) and Torta di Ricotta (\$8) - Homemade Italian cheesecake with a delicate orange sauce.

We were pleasantly surprised when Raffaele himself came out at the end of our meal and brought with him some of his very own homemade arancello. He makes both limoncello and arancello (the orange one). Watch out folks, this stuff is uber strong and will knock your socks off if you're not paying attention! Great flavor and a wonderful way to end an exquisite meal.

Raffaele Ristorante is located at 508 Via de Palmas in Royal Palm Place. 561-392-1110. Their website is still a work in progress, but does have their menu listed: <http://www.raffaelerestaurant.com/>. They are open for lunch M-F 11am - 3pm and dinner every night from 5 - 10pm and until 11pm on Fri & Sat nights.

