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Caputo Trattoria opens at Foxwoods; River restaurant new in Wethersfield

By Joe Amarante Updated 10:24 am EDT, Wednesday, May 23, 2018



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IMAGE 1 OF 13
 Burrata with arugula, toast and chianti-braised onions.

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MASHANTUCKET — The new Italian restaurant at Foxwoods Resort Casino officially arrived on Kentucky Derby Saturday — bright, airy, tasty and somewhat pricey in the space formerly occupied by Al Dente.

Caputo Trattoria opened this month from Craveable Hospitality Group, which runs also-satisfying David Burke Prime steakhouse next door in the Grand Pequot Tower's restaurant level — the brainchild of Craveable's Culinary Director Matt O'Neill and Executive Chef Gary LaMothe.

The decor by Glen & Co. Architecture is meant to be reminiscent of Italy's stone walkways and terracotta architecture with white linens, a pattern-tiled

floor (along with hardwood) and hand-painted plates. Patio lights are strung above the dining room's central oval that suggests a night sky.

In a chat on opening night, O'Neill said the look was meant to convey a bright, Mediterranean feel. In addition to work on the menu with New England native LaMothe, O'Neill had a lot of input into the 18-seat bar area, particularly two large glass globes filled with strong limoncello and traditional negroni (Bombay gin, Contrato vermouth and Campari).

O'Neill, who learned to cook with his Italian grandmother, said in a news release that the menu's seafood, Bolognese sauce, risotto and pizza Napoletana (a \$49 Caputo Pie includes chicken parmesan and hot honey, serving 2-8), represent food from different Italian regions.

The rich-looking pie is one shareable offering; another is pasta (cacio e pepe with spaghetti, black pepper and parmesan) served tableside (\$19/\$29 for small or large). For two people, the burrata cheese plate (\$15) is made more festive when the server takes out a gold scissors to cut into the thin crust and expose the soft cheese beneath. (Burrata is fresh buffalo milk cheese made from mozzarella and cream. The outer shell is mozz.) It was good, but we needed the chianti-braised onion slices with it to add flavor. (I asked for and received salt, I must confess.)

We didn't get to the raw bar offerings or the larger entrées, preferring to try a few smaller plates. The (three) meatballs in Sunday gravy were delicious, slightly crusty and spicy in a good way. The spring pea and prosciutto risotto was nearly perfect — creamy, cheese-flavored and with only tiny bits of prosciutto for flavor but not chewiness.

We also sampled the smaller size of the linguini vongole (\$18/\$27) with cockles, garlic and white wine. The cockles are just small clams, O'Neill noted when I asked what "cockles" are, and I was happy that the pasta was al dente (slightly chewy) and the clams were sweet, without an overpowering garlic flavor. Nice.

The selections of wine and other booze are plentiful, of course, but the wine by the glass was overpriced (\$16 for one unspectacular red) and — I shudder — served in a stemless glass. If you're going to charge more than \$10 or \$11 for a five-ounce glass of wine, I want a stem (which I requested and received for a second, different vintage that was a bit less expensive). The \$16 ice tea Italiano was tall, tasty and pink.

Service was in pairs, which was attentive, friendly and thankfully not rushed but can lead to confusion if you forget who you told something. A couple of the staffers nearby had the dropsies (stems or not), but they handled it professionally.

Overall, Caputo Trattoria left a nice glow as a solid, upscale addition to the Foxwoods culinary world. Just be prepared to drop more than a C note for the experience.

Other recent openings

In Wethersfield, a new restaurant in the office building known as Putnam Park (or the CBS Building, right off I-91's Exit 25 if you bear right instead of going up Route 2), makes you realize how few nice views are available at eateries along the Connecticut River.

River: A Waterfront Restaurant & Bar — on Great Meadow Road — not only includes the waterway in its name but delivers a wide and satisfying view, early visitors tell us. Word is that the food is very good, too, also with an Italian theme. Definitely worth a visit, which we will do soon.

In Southington, value-seekers will welcome the arrival of a new BYOB opportunity. Recently opened **Craft Kitchen** (1244 Meriden Ave.) is from chef and owner Mike Truss.

The restaurant serves classic comfort food such as pizzas, burgers and paninis from fresh ingredients and a "cook from scratch" philosophy, according to a news release. And you can bring your own beverage, which we enjoy. Also on the lunch and dinner menus: French onion soup, specialty pizzas, craft-built duck fat skillet links and house-made pasta.

And in Milford, the well-regarded and remodeled **Bin 100** reopened the other day with a ceremony and ribbon-cutting at 100 Lansdale Ave.

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