

TASTE OF PETALUMA

Stuffed and Satisfied

by Jessie Sunday

A few weeks ago I was lucky enough to join my mom, Laura Sunday, and Meloni Courtway, a food blogger for Petaluma360.com, at Vino Grigio for a sampling of what chef Antonio will be serving at Taste of Petaluma. It was called Ravioli Norma and it was heavenly. A week or two later, I asked my mom if I could come on another “mini-taste”. She said yes, but it wouldn’t be a free ride. I would have to write an article. That sounded like a fair deal to me. I would get a preview of four different restaurants and the tempting dishes they would be preparing for the Taste of Petaluma on September 29. Bring on the food.

Before we began indulging our taste buds, we got a chance to tour the Turning Basin on a water taxi provided by Friends of the Petaluma River. This service will be available to everyone at TOP as well.

Our culinary adventure began at Petaluma Market. If you are a Petaluma Market regular, you know that walking by their barbeque at lunchtime can be a serious salvation danger. If you are like me, there are only so many times you can ask for a sample before you begin to feel guilty. On this day, there was no asking for samples. On this day, I got to sit down and enjoy the best head chef Fredrico Muneton had to offer. We had two distinctly different dishes. One was the shrimp bisque that won the award for best soup in last year’s TOP. It was creamy and satisfying, with a heap of Cajun mashed potatoes standing like an island in the middle of the bowl. It was finished with crispy garlic crustini that did a nice job of sopping up any bisque that hadn’t made it to the spoon. My favorite dish, though, was

coconut shrimp served on an artistically-designed raspberry mango coulis. One could easily eat the coulis as a dessert, but it also works deliciously with the shrimp’s crispy coating.

To burn a few calories, we power-walked down to Finbar Devine’s Irish Pub. I have to admit that the only times I had been in Finbar Devine’s before were to play trivia on a Wednesday night or to meet friends for a pint. This was my first chance to see what Irish classics come out of their kitchen. To whet our appetites, owner/manager Jenny Capurro brought us samplers of Smithwicks beer. (If you want to sound like an Irish beer connoisseur, pronounce it “Smit-icks”.) Then, new chef David Monson asked us to help choose what would represent Finbar Devine’s in TOP. We were served three dishes. The overall winner (and new Taste of Petaluma entrée) will be the miniature brown bread and corned beef sandwiches. My dad, who is a tough customer when it comes to Irish food, wouldn’t let anyone else get a word in as he praised the delectable combination of Guinness home baked bread, corned beef, sauerkraut and pickles. My opinion had, perhaps, a bit less culinary sophistication. “They are just so cute!” If you are hankering for a meal that you could easily find in a pub in Dublin, then get yourself down to Finbar Devine’s and see what Chef David is up to.

The third stop on our mini-taste was the ever-so-comfy Central Market. We were greeted by chef/owner Tony Najiola, who seated us at his counter and shared his thoughts on the two types of pizza that will be showcased at TOP. The first is a traditional Margherita. I watched as Chef Tony built it and tossed it in

the oven. Six short minutes later, I was staring down at fresh basil, mozzarella and a perfectly cooked crust. Magic? Where else can you get a pizza in less than ten minutes? Chef Tony’s “only treat for himself” is the key. His stone oven cooks at a temperature of 700 degrees -- a recipe for disaster if a Chef doesn’t know what he is doing. Chef Tony knows exactly what he is doing, and he proved it again when he served up my personal favorite: a smoked salmon and creamed leak pizza topped with fresh arugula. It was a perfect blend of salty bite and refreshing finish – and definitely worth one of your TOP tickets.

Last, we made the short trip to De Schmire. I have lived in Petaluma for 13 years and I’m ashamed to admit I’ve never before eaten at De Schmire. Greg, one of the head chefs, told us a little about his personal history as well as the restaurant. He is a simple guy who enjoys playing music and having a “good time with food.” From the mismatched dinnerware to the “new age” art on the walls, De Schmire makes you feel right at home. We were served a full-sized dinner of Chicken Cordon Bleu. I didn’t realize I was going to be faced with a full plate after three other restaurants had already treated us to their finest -- but this was too good to pass up. The chicken was like a present, holding a surprise of prosciutto and Gruyere cheese inside. It was served with broccoli in a hollandaise sauce, rice and shoe-string beets decorated with a Nasturtium flower (grown in their backyard). De Schmire will be serving smaller portions of their Cordon Bleu at their host location - Sienna Antiques on Petaluma Boulevard – during Taste of Petaluma.



In a single afternoon, I tasted some amazing concoctions and learned how cooking methods can bring out flavors I never even knew about – raspberry and mango in a coulis, Guinness in a bread, pizza crust cooked at 700 degrees, and Petaluma chicken

bursting with prosciutto and Gruyere. You can have the same experience on a larger scale at Taste of Petaluma on September 29. Don’t miss this chance to enjoy the creations of our town’s most talented and inventive chefs.

THERE’S NO TRICK to it.



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