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Neapolitan Cuisine At Its Best

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The best way to wash down a great Italian meal

[New York Dining Review] I am truly convinced that one of the most telling complement to any experience is the compulsive need to spread the word around to anyone with an ear and the willingness to listen.

Such was my response after a most remarkable dining experience at Patsy's Italian Restaurant, a sixty-five year old family treasure located in the theatre district of Manhattan.

My presence there was that of a specially invited guest to an event dubbed the Sopranos Wine Dinner hosted at Patsy's, reputed for its "one-of-a-kind traditional Neapolitan

Cuisine" and whose menu was paired with the Sopranos vintage collection- a brand of fine Italian wines inspired by the popular HBO hit series.

The Sopranos Wines brand we were told, is expanding its name throughout the US, this event being part of the promotion.

Fans were invited to be a part of this two month affair which began on March 9th, a showcase of sorts "featuring a five course dinner with an expertly paired wine selection". As a bonus the artwork from the Sopranos TV, a collection of nostalgic Italian pieces would be on exhibition throughout the restaurant.

What my dinner companion and I would discover though, was that we were actually privileged as participants to indulge in what was to be a most palate pleasing and sensuous culinary adventure imaginable.

With an ambience akin to a warm embrace - easily personified by chief restaurateur Sal Scognamiglio- Patsy's succeeds in creating an elegant yet casual atmosphere. Infused with attentiveness - the hum of diners engaged in eager conversations, the pleasant enquiries of the waiting staff as they tend with detail to your every need – the aura is comfortable and familial.

This all made sense when Sal with obvious pride explained that this restaurant named after his late grandfather Pasquale "Patsy" Scognamiglio occupies the same location since its inception in 1954 and has had only three chefs throughout its entire history - Patsy, his son Joe- Sal's father, and now Sal himself. In an era when cosmo-cuisine appears to be a serious threat to the authentic, it becomes evident as the night unfolds that Patsy's has remained undoubtedly true and loyal to its Italian traditions.

The first course consisted of Calamari Salad or Shrimp Cocktail paired with the Sopranos Pinot Grigio. A brilliant overture, this combination of seafood blended wonderfully with the light, crisp and firm acidity of the white creating the perfect stimulant for the palate. Following was The Mesculan Salad with Balsamic Vinegar served with the Sopranos Pinot Noir.

A combination which exemplifies the notion that " we can have our salad and drink our wine too" was a culinary *fait accompli* in this well harmonized ensemble. Next on the menu was the Rigatoni Fra Diavolo, a blissfully appealing dish that rendering us wide-eyed with appreciation as we savored one of the most exquisitely prepared pasta al dente topped with a sauce that deemed the descriptions superb and delicious inadequate. I could not help but demand Sal's revelation of the secret ingredients in this masterpiece. Matched with the bold fruitiness of the Sopranos Chianti, a quality that succeeded in balancing out the cooked tomato flavor, it was a notable hit that remains on my repeat wish list.

The entrée of Salmon with Mustard Sauce and Chicken alla Patsy was a show in itself. I must confess that as a seafood fan, poultry reigned slightly over fish in this course, leaving me convinced that this dish of chicken wrapped in prosciutto topped with melted cheese and marinated in reduced lamb stock (the waiter observing our wonderment felt obliged to explain) is the reason great restaurants exist. A signature dish at Patsy's it was an outright winner. The Sopranos Chianti Classico another robust, fruity blend was its brilliant compliment. The Dessert of Cannoli and Biscotti, and that slice of the most delightful Ricotta Cheese Cake that New Yorkers would describe as "to die for", completed the menu.

Culinary experts all agree that a successful meal is one in which the last bite is just as successful as the first, which aptly describes this mini -banquet I must add that such fine cuisine always deserves an encore.

This event, reasonably priced, succeeds in evoking more pleasure than guilt in a time the restraint mode is on overdrive. I can certainly say though, that for this one you can cut yourself some slack.