



Restaurant Review:

Posto by The Federal delivers wildly flavorful and filling food

By Rand Richards Cooper

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Posto is the latest effort by the superb team of Ralph Santaniello and Michael Presnal, who run The Federal in Agawam and West Hartford's Vinted. Set in a strip mall just over the border in Longmeadow, the restaurant, which bills itself as "Old School New Italian," boasts throwback mod decor, like booths with olive-colored leather and chandeliers with clusters of big, moon-like bulbs. Dining-room walls are painted with Italian phrases in giant black letters; youthful photos of Sophia Loren and Dean Martin adorn the bathroom doors, adding to the glam vibe. This is the Rat Pack of Italian eateries.

The bold look and feel perfectly suit Chef Presnal's cooking. Presnal treats your basic pizza-pasta-entree menu as a canvas on which to paint vibrant and intricate creations. Even his side dishes demand attention. Asparagus is grilled to stripy blackness, bathed in olive oil, given a grating of parmesan, then topped with breadcrumbs — and a sunnyside-up fried egg. The caponata with an entrée of seared tuna incorporates zucchini, pignoli, and mint. Deviled eggs feature a tiny shard of parmesan, stuck like a sail in the creamy whipped yolk.



Dishes at Posto are rarely what you expect. Chicken wings are Italianized via a Calabrian chili glaze and a charred half lemon. Big chunks of celery add texture and color to a Buffalo chicken and gorgonzola pizza. An appetizer of veal and pork meatballs gets not only the red sauce, but a bed of creamy polenta, and – wait, there’s more — an herb salsa verde. Tiramisu is converted into a sundae, the cakey ladyfingers organized around a large scoop of coffee gelato and sprinkled with chocolate-coated coffee beans.

Again and again, Posto delivers wildly flavorful and filling food, like a bowl of mussels containing a thick, sweet sauce of San Marzano tomatoes, almost more puree than broth, amped up with pancetta and lots of garlic. Normally I might want the sauce to step back a bit, in order to bring out the flavor of the mussels. But reticence is no virtue when personality is this strong.

To my mind – and mouth – the menu’s true glories are its pastas. Cavatelli is a stewy preparation with kale and broccoli florets in a pork-and-fennel-sausage brown sauce, chili flakes adding a kick. Veal ravioli were amply-sized, scalloped-edged pillows of meat bathed in red sauce and thickly paved with mozz, two chunks of veal shank adding an ossobuco-like touch. A bowl of gnocchi, in a cream-based sauce turned brown by meaty mixed wild mushrooms, was scented with thyme, cheesified with an input of funky Taleggio, and garnished with truffle oil and wafers of Parmesan.

Entrees performed at the same high level. I loved the lavish hanger steak; adorned with braised cannellini beans, heaped with arugula and shards of parmesan, and finished with a lemony olive-oil dressing, the whole production registers somewhere between steak, salad, and stew. Chicken Milanese consisted of a large breast pounded thin, dipped in egg and lightly coated in panko, fried, and covered in stewed tomatoes and yellow bell peppers, topped with arugula and shaved parm, with a charred lemon handy for spritzing.



Posto's balancing act involves a skillful tightrope walk between upscale and family-friendly, elegant and hearty. This is a place where you can order a racily-named cocktail, "Naked & Famous," combining mezcal, Aperol, and yellow chartreuse... but also get spaghetti and meatballs. Family favorites are deftly spiffed up, like lasagna imbued with short rib, or the humble meatloaf, elevated to celestial deliciousity via a balsamic tomato glaze. Appealing retro touches include gelato served in a recycled soup can. And never fear, the signature appetizer that has thrilled fans at The Federal for years — cheesy risotto balls deep-fried and coated in truffle butter — is here as well.

Pricing shrewdly finds the right points. You'll eat extremely well, but the tab won't knock you out. Is that Old School, or New Italian? Whatever it is, people are lapping it up. Posto bangs, even on a Monday night, so I'd recommend reserving a table if you want to join the Rat-Pack throng and find the groove at this casually spectacular eatery.

The Basics

4 ½ stars

Posto by the Federal

647 Bliss Road, Longmeadow, MA

413-935-8500

www.postoitalian.com

The Vibe: Casual, stylish and fun.

The Bill: Snacks, appetizers and salads, \$7 to \$17; pasta and pizza, \$15 to \$30; entrees, \$23 to \$34; side dishes, \$6 to \$7; desserts \$5 to \$9.

Hours: M-T, 3-9 PM; W-Th, 11:30 AM – 9 PM; F-Sat, 11:30 AM – 10 PM; Sun 11:30 AM – 8 PM. Reservations recommended.

Access: Wheelchair access through front door. Seasonal patio dining. Free parking in lot.

<https://www.courant.com/ctnow/food-drink/hc-restaurant-review-posto-20230103-sbbvshkhkrdfxeh125fwn4jy6a-story.html>