

Bar Tulia at the Mercato: A Real Treat Comes To North Naples



Indoor bar and bar dining area, Bar Tulia Mercato

Campagna Hospitality Group (CHG) is a group of investors that own a number of restaurants in Naples, Florida featuring Chef Vincenzo Betulia as their frontman. There are a number of restaurants under the rubric of CHG that are either Italian- or French-themed. One of these eateries, the Italian-inspired Bar Tulia (BT), opened in downtown Naples in the latter part of 2013.

It was themed as a Gastropub, or a bar serving more refined food and in the case of BT, craft cocktails.

In mid-April 2021, BT opened a second restaurant in the Mercato in North Naples. Mercato is a mixed use development of residential and business tenants.

I had dined at BT in downtown Naples when it first opened and was impressed at the quality. I was anxious to try this new version of the mother ship downtown in North Naples. The Menu at the new BT is thematically the same as the original BT, but differs in content which only further highlights the culinary prowess of its head chef.

I had two dining companions with me on this culinary foray, and all of us liked what we saw regarding the restaurant's setup. The interior of the restaurant is warm and inviting as is the original BT, though differs as it has much more of its space devoted to outdoor dining. Now for the food.



Fried eggplant and olive tapenade

Before your order is taken, you are brought bread with a serving of a lovely fried eggplant/olive-based tapenade. Tapenades are spreads or condiments, perfectly melding with slices of bread as a sort of an Amuse-bouche. The tapenade served here was delicious. Even better, you can probably order seconds!

We started with a couple of items from their Menu. The first was their pig mac.



Pig Mac sliders

These were small two bite sandwiches with lettuce, onions, cheese, extremely high quality pork belly, and a “secret sauce”. This pays homage to a friend of Chef Betulia and frequent patron of the restaurant that was involved with a number of McDonald’s restaurants in North America. These were superb, and I was impressed with the “top-notch” quality of the pork belly.

We then moved onto the Moroccan charred baby back ribs.



Moroccan charred baby back ribs

The ribs are first dry rubbed, then braised in beer with celery, carrots, turmeric, cumin, saffron, and other spices. They are then grilled to order. The ribs are served with Charmoula, a Moroccan condiment typically made of parsley, cilantro, cumin, garlic and olive oil, and a mint Raita, a yogurt-based dip accented with mint. Another great dish.

One of my dining companions ordered the Spanish octopus bruschetta.



Octopus Bruschetta

This was another excellent choice. Classically, Bruschetta are slices of bread topped with olive oil and garlic then toasted. At BT, these are topped with tomatoes, celery leaf, zucchini, taggiasca (Niçoise) olives, and bone marrow Gremolata. Gremolatas are green condiments usually made from parsley, lemon zest, and garlic. Highly recommended.

Next, a pasta dish was ordered for the table. This was garganelli with a lamb neck sugo. Fennel seed, tomato, and pecorino cheese sealed the deal.



Garganelli with lamb neck sugo

At BT, all pasta are made in-house. It is very uncommon to find in-house made Garganelli, a tubular egg-based pasta used with meat sauces. Sugos are meat sauces similar to ragus. With sugos the meat is roasted first, shredded, and the meat and pan juices added to the tomato sauce. With ragus, the meats are cooked along with the tomato sauce. Conceptually, this is a slight difference but the lamb sugo was delicious and with the in-house made pasta, terrific.

The last thing ordered was the field green Mista salad.



Field green mista salad

Mista in Italian means mixed. The salad is a mixture of greens, carrots, asparagus, onion, ribboned manchego cheese, and watermelon radish. I love Watermelon Radish. When it's sliced into ribbons as it is here with a mandolin, its electric coloring really adds to a vegetable presentation. The salad is finished with an olive oil vinaigrette and is really good.

The food at BT is excellent. My two dining companions and I had a great lunch seated outside. The service was very good. Our server was somewhat knowledgeable about the menu items and did not rush us to finish to accommodate other diners.

One thing I thought was amusing was the name of the restaurant group that owns BT, Campagna Hospitality Group. Campagna is not only a town in Southern Italy but can mean bell ringer in Italian. With the latter meaning in mind, it suggests a bell ringing to "come and get it" when the food is ready.

The food quality and presentations should really entice diners to come and get it, and I hope they do. The price points here are at the upper range of Naples restaurant pricing. With the use of, for the lack of a better word, "artisanal" local producers that are the bedrock of quality cooking, and the efforts of Chef Betulia, that extra money spent is well worthwhile.

I hope you enjoy your meal at BT as much as we did. I look forward to being a return diner.

It's a wrap for another post on Forks.

Bar Tulia- Mercato

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Open daily, 1130AM - 12AM, All major credit cards accepted; Onsite parking. **Peter Horan, Southwest Florida Forks, posted on SouthFloridaReporter.com, May 13, 2021**

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