



\$25 AND UNDER; A Surprise From Bologna Warms a Village Table

By Sam Sifton
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HERE'S a tip from the boys at the WXOU bar on Hudson Street, whispered over pints. Just walk into Da Andrea, that little joint across the street, and order a plate of tigelle (\$8.50). Do it even before you've looked at the menu, before you've asked for a short glass of wine, before anything. Biscuits are involved. It takes a while to make.

A young couple from Bologna, Tiziana Vecchietti and Pietro Branchi, have been Da Andrea's owners since the beginning of 2001. Ms. Vecchietti said they were able to get the space when the original Andrea, who was from Capri, decided to return to Italy. Mr. Branchi runs the kitchen along with Andrea Vecchietti, Ms. Vecchietti's brother, so there was no need to change the restaurant's name.

The couple painted the walls white and added a few farmhouse touches above the tile floors, lightening the mood of the place. Ms. Vecchietti put a few flowers out. And then Mr. Branchi and Mr. Vecchietti set to making dinner. What had been a dependably average West Village Italian restaurant soon revealed itself to be something else: a dependably good local favorite, one with ambition.

Now about that tigelle (pronounced tee-GEL-lay), which Ms. Vecchietti called a home-style Modenese favorite. It's a plate of warm biscuits fresh from the oven and as thick as a fashion magazine in a down economy. It is accompanied by a small bowl of grated Parmesan cheese and about a dozen sheets of thin-sliced Parma prosciutto. You slice a biscuit open, sprinkle cheese on the steaming bread, fold some prosciutto onto one side, close the covers and eat the melting flavors. A ham and cheese sandwich, yes. But for Plato there would be no other.

Other starters include a warm octopus salad (\$6.50) in which bits of rich and chewy meat are mixed with moist croutons, tangy olives and the soft give of roasted potatoes. Over a bass line of flavorful olive oil, the dish allows all four flavors to combine and yet remain distinct. There is also an excellent salad of grilled baby squid (\$6.50) over a leaf pile of mesclun, with a bright and lemony vinaigrette, and a nice beef carpaccio (\$8.50) with peppery arugula, Parmesan and hearts of palm.

The restaurant's pastas are made daily and are worth exploring as a shared appetizer or as a supper in themselves. Spaghetti with clams and diced tomatoes in an oceanic white-

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wine sauce (\$9.50) may suffer from the use of wan supermarket tomatoes, but an abundance of sweet little cockles heals all wounds, as does the excellence of the pasta itself.

Better is spaghetti combined with the restaurant's wonderfully rich, meaty Bolognese sauce (\$8.50) or, better still, Da Andrea's ravioli (\$9.50). Diners may choose from either a delicious pillow of chopped artichoke hearts, served in a soft, tangy sauce made of goat cheese and cream, or a great big ottoman of shredded veal and spinach, in a sauce made of mushrooms, prosciutto and yet more cream.

The restaurant's entree course is less assured. There's a terrific lamb shank for the bargain-basement price of \$14, which comes with a stew of mixed vegetables, a pile of toothy cannellini beans and a drift of meaty ragù. But rolled stuffed veal with spinach mozzarella, prosciutto and a thyme sauce (\$14) tastes more like banquet fare, and so does a gigantic pork chop (\$13.50) served with starchy grilled corn.

Desserts, too, have an uncomfortably industrial tang, whether in the form of a singed napoleon crême brûlée (\$5), which one night tasted like a house fire, or the by-the-book tiramisù (\$5). Better to enjoy a plate of the kitchen's crunchy biscotti (\$4), a glass of house-made limoncello and your memories of that artful tigelle. Maybe you wouldn't drive in from Nyack to eat it. That would probably be fine with anyone in the neighborhood with a taste for good northern Italian food.

Da Andrea

557 Hudson Street (Perry Street), Greenwich Village; (212) 367-1979.

BEST DISHES -- Tigelle, grilled squid, octopus salad, ravioli, lamb shank, biscotti.

PRICE RANGE -- Starters, \$4.50 to \$8.50; pastas, \$8.50 to \$9.50; entrees, \$12 to \$16.50.

CREDIT CARDS -- MasterCard, Visa.

HOURS -- Sunday to Thursday, 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday, Saturday, to 11 p.m.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS -- Restaurant is up two steps. Restrooms are down steep stairs.

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