San Diego CityBeat
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NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

CHULA VISTA

Punk rock legends, epic tacos and mountains and mountains of salt

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BY JAMES VERNETTE

DISHING IT OUT

Instagram-worthy Italian

When Liberty Station was being built, I was one of those cranky locals holding my arms together while sneering that the place was doomed to become a fake sort of theme park like the Gaslamp.

My attitude has mellowed a lot since then. It still seems eerily dark at night, especially because none of the businesses have light-up signage, but places such as Liberty Public Market, The Lot and Stone Brewing have made it a place I can safely visit without feeling stuck in a tourist trap. Add to that **Officine Buona Forchetta** (2865 Sims Road), a new Northern Italian place that has a sister restaurant in South Park. I haven't been to the original location, but it's obviously good enough that the owners were able to set up shop in Liberty Station where the real estate is undoubtedly pricier.

JAMES VERNETTE

LAMB SKEWERS IN A CLAY JUG

If it had been warm enough, I would have sat outdoors, as the atmosphere seemed slightly more festive. However, the dining room has a Fiat that's been converted into a table for two to sit side-by-side. These types of design elements give the place a great date-night vibe; cozy yet cool, warm hearted with good food served in an eye-catching manner that should inspire a thousand selfies.

I started with the lamb skewer appetizers, or Arrosticini: chunks of lamb served kabob style in a big jug with fingerling potatoes and arugula. The presentation is definitely Instagram-worthy and the skewers themselves are juicy and tender enough to please even those who aren't fond of lamb. The artichoke hearts are also a good call, as they are not diced up, but removed in one piece and served with herbs and olive oil. They practically melted in my mouth.

The Octopus Carpaccio had a nice flavor, but seemed a little bland next to the previous dishes. Had I known this, I would have bucked tradition and asked that the salad be served before the appetizers when it would have made more of an impact.

As far as cocktails are concerned, my designated driver liked his Sicilian Mule more than I enjoyed my Picante Peppercorn Margarita. The flavors in my cocktail were decent, and I enjoyed the pink peppercorns but they didn't quite blend together.

Before you get on my case about the lameness of ordering a margarita at an Italian restaurant, it should be noted the Sicilian Mule wasn't really Italian either, just Russian vodka, grapefruit juice, lime and ginger beer. But in the case of the mule, the flavors melded better than those in my margarita.

For the main course, we split a gourmet Luigina Pizza with mozzarella, white truffle cream, porcini and prosciutto di parma. The white truffle cream did the work of the tomato sauce and added a nice, unexpected mouth feel. It worked well with the creaminess of the mozzarella and the saltiness of the prosciutto, but overpowered the porcini. The pizza itself is soft and thick. The pie is cut in quarters so customers will likely be folding a piece before putting it in their mouth.

When I saw pork parmigiana on the specials menu, I wanted to try it. It's such an old-school dish that I wanted to see how a more new-school place might tackle it. The tomato sauce was on the sweet side and the cheese was more mozzarella than parmesan. I really liked it, especially the tenderness of the pork. It would have been nice if the cheese was saltier to play off the sweetness of the sauce, but I was happy with the result, especially because the server paired it with a juicy Sangiovese.

There's a lot to bring me back to Officine Buona Forchetta, but now that I've experienced it, I will definitely ask for the Octopus Carpaccio first and stick with the wine over the cocktails. Still, there was no sneering, nor were there any theme park feelings. If readers have relatives in town or are trying to impress a date, it's definitely worth a visit. CB

Dishing It Out appears every other week.

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