beverly hills Lifestyle

Fall Fashion

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$20.00
Bellisimo!

Andrea at Pelican Hill
Newport Beach, CA

by Jesse Stirling

Inspired by the traditions and culinary romance of Italy, Chef Luca Cesarini creates flavors that are dedicated to the finest local ingredients, enhancing the best from land and sea. With its grand location atop Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, Andrea restaurant is reminiscent of an Italian palace. The main dining room is huge, painted with the light colors of the Mediterranean. Enormous windows open to an outside patio, overlooking the Pacific Ocean and Crystal Cove below, framing a spectacular Newport sunset. Live acoustic guitar music floats through the air, providing the perfect soundtrack for a special evening. The vibe is swanky but friendly.

Obviously, word of this winning formula has spread. The place is packed on a Tuesday night. The clientele is a mixed bag: some suits, some casual, and lots of well-to-do couples with romance in their eyes. The terrace is the most sought after seating. Jets of warm air heat you from above and below, and the view is spectacular. Everyone from the hostess to waiter to general manager is quite knowledgeable about the menu and preparation, extremely attentive and polite. You feel waited on hand-and-foot, yet never intruded upon. In short, the service is immaculate.

Chef Cesarini greets our table and shares his story. “My relatives are in the food business in Northern Italy, so I grew up with the mentality—eat!” Gesturing towards the rolling green landscape of the adjacent Pelican Hill golf course, he continues, “With this view, how can you not be happy?” Asked to describe his culinary philosophy, Luca replies, “I’m passionate about putting dynamic twists on traditional food.” Indeed, Chef has put together an extensive and complex menu, a “formal but fun” twelve course tasting experience. First, we sample the tremendous cocktail program, particularly enjoying the blueberry lemon drop, pomegranate martini, and Negroni, a slightly bitter Italian aperitif intended to stimulate the appetite.
Time for the food! First up is an amuse bouche, consisting of crispy prosciutto with basil pesto mozzarella. The flavors of salty bacon and rich, creamy cheese compliment each other magnificently. Then, what looks like a colorful Napoleon pastry is actually comprised of roasted fall vegetables, dough and custard replaced by layered veggies, pesto and ricotta. The string of light appetizers continues with an amazing tuna panzanella seasoned with herbs and sweet tomatoes, then beef carpaccio, flavored with arugula, parmigiano reggiano, and capers. We shift to red wine (Gavi di Gavi, Franco Fiorina, Piemonte), the robust flavor pairing nicely with the beef.

Italians eat like no one else, and one dish alone is a testament to this. The eggplant parmigiana is sheer perfection. Evoking a French onion soup experience, each serving comes in a mini sliver pot with lid. Cheesy, saucy, savory goodness – nay, greatness – words cannot do this justice to this recipe. Bravo!

We jump from one signature dish to another. Spinach ricotta ravioli with delicate sage butter sauce is topped with fresh shaved parmesan cheese, flown in from Milan that week. The understated seasoning lets the authentic tastes of fresh, simple ingredients speak for themselves. This might be the best pasta I’ve ever eaten in my life, each ravioli melting in my mouth.

Good food is like a buzz, and the fun continues with a nice and simple seared sea bass accompanied by Sicilian pesto and vegetables. The final entrée is a seared prime beef filet, with cipollini, barolo jus, and distinctive sweet onion marmalade. A glass of Cum Laude, Banfi Toscana, a Sicilian red with high alcohol content and lots of fruit, brings the selection of main dishes to a rousing conclusion.

We are informed that in the kitchen, amongst all the Italians, a lone French pastry chef has been hard at work. The results of his effort are magnifique. Our bento box of desserts includes: White peach panno cotta, brandied cherry frozen soufflé, almond fig tart, a trio of delicately flavored gelatos (bitter chocolate, sour raspberry and vanilla bean), and finally, a whole topiary of little chocolate bits of heaven. As we wash it all down with a glass of 40-year old port, one can’t help but think that a few centuries ago, opulent dining of this quality was reserved for royalty.

If you are looking for an extravagant celebration dinner, you will find exactly what you desire at Andrea. Everything flows very well – the service, the food, the regal ambiance and gorgeous location all create a well-orchestrated symphony. Fancy but not gaudy, formal but not stuffy, every note rings true. I still dream about this meal, and will be back to Andrea many times. Bellissimo!