

## Wine & Vine serves house-made Italian fare in chic surroundings

By Laura Bianchi | Daily Herald Correspondent

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### **Wine & Vine**

105 S. York St., Elmhurst; (630) 832-9463

**Cuisine:** Italian/American

**Setting:** Sophisticated, romantic trattoria

**Price range:** Appetizers \$5.85 to \$9.25; salads \$6.95 to \$8.50; entrees \$12.95 to \$38.95; desserts \$6.95 to \$7.95

**Hours:** Lunch 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday; dinner 5 to 11 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday

**Accepts:** All major credit cards except American Express

**Reservations:** Recommended

If there's a financial crisis in this country you wouldn't know it by the crowd on a recent Saturday night at Wine & Vine in downtown Elmhurst.

Open just since July, this sophisticated trattoria was humming with festive parties of six to eight and intimate tables of two.

Executive chef Hank Dreyer worked his way through the 80-seat dining room, clearly enjoying the "meet and greet" aspect of his new venture.

Trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., Dreyer, 44, prefers to let chef Mark Vicksinich, 23, handle the hot-and-heavy kitchen duty. A Woodridge resident and graduate of CHIC, the Culinary and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, the young Vicksinich's already lengthy resume includes stints at top-rated Blackbird and Marche in Chicago.

A combination restaurant and wine shop with kitchen gadgets, Wine & Vine brings an understated sophistication to the Western suburbs that would transfer well to the city.

Linen-topped tables are arrayed over polished wood floors with rustic metal chandeliers overhead. In the wine lounge at the rear, look for the custom-painted mural of a Tuscan winery.

The 20-seat "chef's platform" is a deep, marble-topped counter wrapping around the open kitchen; it provides front-row seats to the action on both sides.

In such chic surroundings, the moderately priced menu is a surprise.

Dreyer and Vicksinich have assembled traditional Italian and American favorites, generally well prepared, on a menu that's large enough to cover everyone, small enough to digest quickly.

Nothing is fried or cooked from frozen ingredients. Sauces, salad dressings and desserts are made from scratch on site.

Appetizers are wide-ranging, from sautéed baby squid to kalamata olives with blue cheese and French bread.

We splurged on seared diver scallops, the top of the line at \$9.25 and worth it. Three enormous scallops are beautifully seared and seasoned, enough for two to share. If the garlic in the white bean puree were a bit more mellow, this would be perfect.

In another worthy starter, the house pesto, a long-standing recipe of Dreyer's, stands out as a filling for Portobello mushroom caps. But I liked the basil-based sauce on bread, too.

Another option to try next time: cherry tomatoes sautéed in balsamic vinegar with fresh basil on homemade lavosh, a flatbread.

Of the 13 main courses, half are less than \$20 and all pastas and entrees include soup or small house salad. That's a smart strategy when restaurants are slogging through a bad market. The house salad is fine, though the lemon vinaigrette is heavy on citrus flavor. Splurge instead on Dreyer's lush, house-made tomato-basil soup. Finely balanced between cream, tomato and basil, this one is sure to win a following.

Aside from the basic house salad, Wine & Vine offers six more, including a chopped salad with pasta and gorgonzola and a fresh mozzarella with baby greens and tomatoes.

Dreyer jokes that "Tony Soprano would kill for" the Chicago Pasta - a slight exaggeration, perhaps, but I wouldn't argue with Tony over it.

Light, fresh marinara sauce and grated parmesan cover a plentiful bowl of linguini topped by a fennel-studded Italian sausage.

Chicken piccata gets everything right. The lightly breaded chicken breast is juicy and tender, the lemon and butter sauce pleasantly zesty. Earthy rice pilaf works well with this dish, but the side of fresh green beans was 20 seconds from raw.

Elsewhere on the menu: a brawny 12-ounce pork chop marinated in brown sugar and herbs with roasted garlic mashed potatoes, shrimp scampi and vegetable lasagna. Entrees top out at \$38.95 for the seafood medley of scallops, salmon, shrimp, polenta and white bean puree.

Pace yourself so you can at least share one of Wine & Vine's happy endings. Vicksinich developed his crème brulee recipe, infused with vanilla bean, when he was sweet 16 and it needs no revisions.

Dark Valhrona chocolate and peanut butter ganache glaze a dense, chocolate cake that might be the upscale and more-decadent version of a peanut butter cup.

Service is warm, friendly and efficient, exactly what you expect from a small operation where the owner is hands-on. Still, we had to ask for bread and butter and our server needs to become more familiar with the menu.

Aside from that, Wine & Vine's intimate, romantic aura is sure to spark a proposal or two, especially after Dreyer's dramatic leap into the fray.

During the height of the dinner rush last month, "in full chef riot gear," Dreyer jumped onto the chef's platform and proposed to his girlfriend and business partner, Beth Corcoran.

"I'm just glad she said yes," says Dreyer. "Otherwise, I would have done a header into the floor."

- Restaurant reviews are based on one anonymous visit. Our aim is to describe the overall dining experience while guiding the reader toward the menu's strengths. The Daily Herald does not publish reviews of restaurants it cannot recommend.