

Go Italian, go Cipolla

STREETS focuses on foreign cuisines this week and seeks out the new, the exotic and the yummiest. SUZANNA PILLAY is bowled over by newly opened Italian eatery Cipolla Ristorante and Pizzeria.



PARTNERS: (From left) Sisters and co-directors of Cipolla, Yvonne and Leonie

ASIDE from *mamak* restaurants (Indian-Muslim restaurants), another cuisine which is popular in Bangsar and Lucky Garden, if you count the number of pizza eateries is Italian food.

Some people might wonder why the owners of the year-old Cipolla Ristorante and Pizzeria (incidentally the same people behind the successful Ciccio ristorante and Pizzeria in Changkat Bukit Bintang) decided to set up shop in an area where there already so many Italian eateries.

"People know how to appreciate Italian food now and are more in tune with it. As for the competition, we're consistent with our food. Consistency is important because that's what keeps us around," said

EASY DOES IT: The art of making pizza.



PIZZA WITH A DIFFERENCE: *Bresaola* comes with air-dried beef, rocket salad and Gorgonzola cheese.

Yvonne Tan who together with sister Leonie and Venetian chef Rudy Stecca are co-directors of Cipolla and Ciccio.

Ciccio is known for its wood-fired gourmet pizzas, wide variety of bruschettas and pasta. Likewise, the Cipolla menu, said Yvonne, is similar to Ciccio's in that it is a full restaurant menu with starters, pizza and pasta but has a "modern contemporary twist". It also varies in look from Ciccio's rustic appeal and leans instead towards a modern contemporary look of concrete, glass and steel.

"The reason for the different look is because we believe Bangsar has a more trendy, younger crowd. We did not want Cipolla to have the same look or exactly the same menu as Ciccio's but rather an extension of it serving a different market."

So what keeps the crowd coming back to the Cipolla?

"We offer customers the choice of fresh or dried pasta, as well as a wide variety of toppings for our bruschetta, which is not available elsewhere. Most restaurants serve bruschetta with just tomato but we are different."

What's their secret to scrumptious pizza and pasta? Cipolla believes that pasta has to be "al dente" while pizza has to have a crust that is "crispy yet a little bit bready".

Hmmm... "al dente" is not a problem with locals anymore? There was a time when Malaysians thought pasta "al dente" was

partially cooked.

"It's not a problem anymore. Few customers think pasta 'al dente' is hard anymore," said Yvonne with a smile.

For appetisers, Yvonne suggested moccche and an assortment of bruschette. The moccche turned out to be a delightful dish of light and puffy deep-fried soft shell crabs with capers and a garlic dip (RM28), a nice alternative to the usual deep-fried calamari (squid rings) available at Italian eateries.

Equally delicious were the platter of assorted bruschette featuring toppings such as salmon (smoked salmon, mascarpone cheese and sundried tomatoes), tonno (tuna mayonnaise topped with prawns and capers), *bresaola* (air-dried beef, rocket salad and gorgonzola cheese, *funghi e brie* (with mushrooms and brie cheese) and grilled eggplant.

Acquired tastes are the olive and radicchio (brie and red chicory) bruschette with their salty and slightly bitter flavours.

Another big winner from the Cipolla kitchen was the fresh ravioli. The *ravioli di pesce* (RM38) — small pillows of squid ink-flavoured pasta casings stuffed with generous helpings of seafood mince, topped with prawns and a luscious creamy saffron sauce were simply divine.

Subtler, but just as good was the *ravioli di carne* (RM36), which was ravioli filled with chicken and red chicory served with porcini mushroom and rosemary sauce. *Envisage* forrestiere sauce for steak poured over fresh pillows of chicken-stuffed pasta and you'll get the picture.

The generous servings of porcini mushrooms placed on top of the pasta were delightfully tender.

For pizza, Yvonne recommended *bresaola* (RM30), which was a light pizza topped with a generous topping of sliced air-dried beef, rocket salad, brie cheese, tomato and shavings of Mozzarella. As I bit into my slice of pizza I understood what Yvonne meant about a good pizza base having the right thickness.

Light but not biscuit-hard, the crust comprised a thin cushion of soft dough lying on top of a crunchier outer crust that provided enough bite to make the pizza great.

Cipolla opens daily from noon to 2.30pm and 6pm to 10.30pm. It also has a menu for takeaway orders. Just call 03-2287-



SIMPLY MARVELLOUS: Moccche, a delightful dish of deep-fried soft shell crabs with capers and a garlic dip.



TUCK IN: (From left) *Ravioli di pesce* and *ravioli di carne*.



TEMPTING SELECTION: Assorted bruschette for a scrumptious meal.

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Appetisers at Cipolla range from RM18 for an eggplant parmigiana to RM64 for an antipasti platter for two, while prices for the bruschette (grilled bread) range from RM12 to RM16 depending on the choice of toppings. Pizza and pasta start from RM20 and RM22 respectively.

Cipolla is at No. 4 Jalan Telawi 2, 59100 Kuala Lumpur.

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