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SUNDAYPAPER.COM | APRIL 26-MAY 2, 2009

THE SUNDAY PAPER



YOU GO, SUGO

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There are some foods that, once eaten, are never forgotten. They even achieve “major craving” status. That’s the case with the oversized meatballs served at Sugo, a family-owned eatery with two locations in Roswell and another in Duluth.

Of course, there are more than meatballs on the menu, which is inspired by the Greek and Italian heritage of the owner, Fred Castellucci. But the meatballs are the hardest to forget. Served in single or double portions as an appetizer and with some of the pasta dishes, these meatloaf-sized circles are made with sausage, roasted tomatoes and dates, then drizzled with a tomato basil sauce and caramelized onions.

Sugo fans have followed Castellucci since he first arrived on the food scene several years ago with the Roasted Garlic in Alpharetta. He tried taking a break, but his passion for food and wine drew him back to the kitchen. Now he’s now starting to turn the business over to his son and his daughter, who grew up

working in the family enterprise. Together, they’re following the principles of tasty, plentiful food, good service and prices that won’t require a second mortgage.

The Sugo in the Roswell Clocktower complex is typical of the concept. There are several dining rooms packed with oversized tables and an eclectic mishmash of dining chairs. There’s a small bar area just inside the door and an adjacent patio for al fresco dining. It’s often busy midweek: Recent visits on a Tuesday and Thursday found the place buzzing. A crowd means the kitchen may occasionally run out of specials, but there’s always plenty on the menu to pick from.

But back to the meatballs. Order two, and then take a look at the rest of the tapas menu. But be forewarned: Sugo tapas are not the three-bite dishes you may find in other restaurants. As is the case with most of the menu items, the dishes are big, bordering on ridiculous. (Nancy Castellucci, mother of the clan, says that guests have suggested they cut back the portions as a

way to economize. But it turns out that leftovers are one of the restaurant’s best advertisements: “People heat them up in the office the next day, and everyone wants to know where they got the great food,” says Nancy.)

A starter of flatbread topped with shaved Parm, arugula and prosciutto arrives on a giant meat platter. A selection of heirloom tomatoes features three fat slices topped with mozzarella, strawberries and cherries. The four-cheese antipasto, drizzled with an aged balsamic vinegar, is brimming with mozzarella, tomatoes, a mix of artisan cheese, field greens, cherry peppers, olives and caramelized radishes. Other options are the Greek spinach pie, bacon-wrapped dates and calamari stuffed with onions, spinach and cheese.

The list of memorable main dishes is lengthy. There’s the “Three Tenors” platter of lamb shank, meatballs and sausages; the “Pasta Duetto” of two fresh pastas paired with meatballs; and a pork tenderloin stuffed with walnut pesto, sausage, cheese and onions. Entree specials often

include filet mignon, rib eye, veal and a fresh fish, such as a thick rectangle of halibut gently sauteed in lemon, butter, olive oil and capers and paired with three squash-filled ravioli.

The revolving dessert lineup may include a lemon sponge and cheese layer cake or a chocolate peanut butter bombé. No matter what you end the meal with, you’ll be treated to a sip of something special from the bar. And every visit features a tableside greeting by one of the family members. Sugo bartenders and wait staff are well-versed in the international wine menu, heavy on the Italian varietals, natch. They’re also doing their own infusions and have just unveiled two new signature cocktails: a bacon-infused old fashioned and a muddled sage mixed with gin, lime, lemon, maple syrup, club soda and egg whites that results in a thick, frothy drink.

If you’re not into doggie bags, go for the half-portion option of many entrees. But you may regret not having those leftovers for tomorrow’s lunch. **SP**