



Heidi Raker

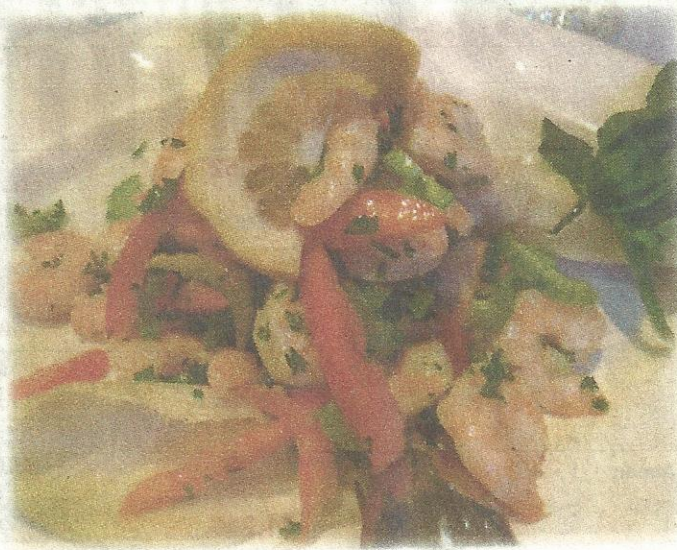
STEPPIN' OUT TO EAT

La Riviera Trattoria: Southern Italian Specialties

Clifton Restaurant's Traditional & Gluten-Free Menu Delights

With the days leading up to Easter traditionally void of meat on Fridays, La Riviera Trattoria, a 30-year old family style Italian restaurant in Clifton, has delicious, hearty antidotes to the period known as Lent. I visited recently with my daughter, a pasta fanatic, and we enjoyed a veritable feast of meatless dishes. Franco Carlino, chef and owner, brings Italian classics to life and many of them are offered in gluten-free format as well. The restaurant draws patrons from around the country for its meticulous rendering of fine Italian cuisine and is beloved for its ability to satisfy those with Celiac and wheat intolerance as well.

When Carlino's daughter Maria was diagnosed with Celiac Disease in 2009, it became her mission to create a gluten-free menu for her father's restaurant. Together with her talented brother chef Anthony, the restaurant serves up some of northern NJ's best Italian fare. (The entire kitchen crew is thoroughly trained to serve gluten-free items. The carefully created gluten free menu offers ap-



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petizers, salads, pastas, entrees and desserts.)

We started with a delicious warm shrimp salad (\$13.95) tossed with lemon vinaigrette over greens, celery and tomato strips. Two traditional Tuscan Lenten pastas followed. The first is Strascinate (\$18.95), a homemade coin-shaped pasta tossed with sautéed leeks, a traditional spring vegetable, and a bit of tomato. The dish had a slight sweetness that came from slow, patient cooking of the leeks.

The second pasta dish, Orecchiette Del Bosco (\$18.95) available gluten-free style, married shaved porcini and wild mushrooms sautéed in butter with a tear drop of truffle oil, julienned basil and parmigiano cheese. The depth of flavor in this dish and the richness of the mushrooms had an almost beefy feeling. A bit of garlic is sautéed with the porcini initially and discarded before tossing with the pasta, chef Franco told me. The flavors are nuanced and the dish had a heartiness without being heavy.

Seafood offerings are extensive as are beef and chicken selections. Everything is homemade on the premises. Gluten-free pastas and pizza dough are imported from Italy. The beauty of Chef Franco and Chef Anthony's cuisine comes from its lightness. Dishes are prepared without excessive salt, cream or butter. This is the signature style of the kitchen and the cooking of Calabria, where Chef Franco learned his craft when he began cooking in family kitchens at age 6. His love for cooking is evident in the way the restaurant is managed with extreme care and passion by his daughter, Maria, and the love that is so present in La Riviera Trattoria's food.

La Riviera Trattoria
421-27 Piaget Avenue, Clifton, NJ
973-478-4181
www.LaRivieraTrattoria.com

Redhead With A Fork will be providing Steppin' Out readers with an insider's look at the local food scene. Know of a foodie gem and willing to share it with others? Let the Redhead know. Email Redhead With a Fork, aka Heidi Raker, at Heidi@Redheadwithafork.com.