Elegante!

Way beyond red sauce

Sorellina ("little sister") is a vast open space with a stratospheric, white-tiled ceiling and several white columns as thick around as redwoods. Everything but the cork floor is white, black, or very dark brown. The few modernist decorative elements are writ large: part of one wall is a light-box mural with a photographic image of a manicured landscape devoid of blooms. The floor-to-ceiling racks of wines are tantalizingly caged behind chicken wire, and the quilted curtains that line the street side look like something U-Haul might hand out to protect one's couch during a rough ride.

Definitely a dearth of what we'd call "intimate warmth." But that's OK. Sorellina's owners, Jamie Mammano and Paul Roiff (who also operate Mistral, Teatro, and The Federalist), have instead created a professionally chic, smoothly run destination restaurant with reliably plush food and flawless service for 126 people, most of whom seem to come in groups of four or more. It's a great place to go to feel faintly Italian, woo clients, watch stylish people from the small strip of bar, impress status-conscious dates, or grandly celebrate the holidays en masse.

Expect to spend some money. Entrées range from $36 to the extravagant $85 (for the prime aged beef) and the excellent wine list averages about $100 a bottle (and includes the $500 Niebaum-Coppola 1994 "Rubicon" from Napa). Chef Robert Jean uses only top-notch ingredients and turns out fresh, richly cooked Italian- and French-inspired food in satisfyingly large portions.

The chunky tuna tartare ($18), mixed with a spicy mustard aioli and chili vinegar, was among the best we have ever tasted. It came with discs of slightly salty crackers reminiscent of papadum. The "Verdure," an appetizer of chilled, delicately cooked farmers' market vegetables ($16)—haricots verts, golden beets, and parsnips among them—was topped with tangy Parmigiano Reggiano slices and a white balsamic vinaigrette.

Although heavy on the meat, the menu offered up a velvety-soft Alaskan salmon ($38) with a crunchy skin in a sweetish balsamic sauce and a short stack of celery and "trumpet royale" mushrooms that were softened in warm butter and tasted, interestingly, a bit like lobster. The two grilled Colorado lamb chops ($42), cut as thick as filet mignon, were moist and tender and came with mashed potatoes still attached to their woody skins, a chewy Swiss chard, and a reduction with raisins. The sticky sauce also added zest to the delectable side dish of shoestring potatoes fried in truffle oil ($10). In fact, some vegetarian diners might make a meal out of the exceptional side dishes, such as the eggplant gratinata, sweet-corn polenta, and chili-flaked broccoli rabe.

For dessert, the cannoli's ($9) mascarpone cream was cool and luscious, but the pastry shell tasted cardboard-dull, especially in light of the sorbets ($8), which tinged with tangy fruit (lemon, melon, and raspberry) and came with old-style Italian anise-flavored cookies. Biting into the simple buttery wafer reminded us of just how far Italian food in America has come from red sauce and meatballs. ~N.P.B.