



Revitalized Rose Pistola does well from antipasti to dessert

By: Patricia Unterman | 06/16/11 7:16 PM

When Rose Pistola opened in North Beach 15 years ago, its wood-burning pizza oven and Ligurian focus broke new culinary ground.

In February, the restaurant closed for a two-week spruce-up. Mark Gordon, the estimable chef from Cow Hollow's Terzo, a sister restaurant, has been expediting in front of the Rose Pistola cooking line, and new manager/sommelier Lisa Robins, formerly of Rubicon, signed on to work with both customers and staff. The restaurant feels revitalized.

Rose Pistola is a major, full-service operation with a full bar and lounge, live music, a spacious dining room and sidewalk seating. It stays open all day, every day, encourages walk-ins but also takes reservations.

The multifaceted menu stars wood-burning pizza, plus pasta, housemade salume, Italian cheese plates, bruschette (toasts piled with rich toppings with a poached egg add on), lots of sexy antipasti, and seasonally driven main courses.

It has succeeded in a neighborhood where so many have failed because it fulfills almost any eating and drinking desire at a consistently high level. Locals can take visitors to Rose Pistola, and everyone will leave happy.

Exciting pizza still comes out of the oven. One with crackling thin crust, topped with nettles, house-made sausage and pickled red peppers (\$17), the flavors intensified, almost caramelized, from the heat, was perfectly balanced and fun to eat.

I am also a fan of Rose's spaghetti with seafood sauce (\$18), thin, excitingly al dente pasta, dressed in saffron-scented, tomato-tinged sauce, textured with finely chopped fish, squid and mussels — sort of a seafood bolognese. I always order it.

Linguine with soft hunks of braised brisket made into a sugo and scattered with lots of fresh peas (\$17) acts like a homey main course.

Two classic Rose Pistola main courses work best served family style.

Our waiter brought a whole grilled branzino (\$36) — a European sea bass — to the table to be admired and then returned it so skillfully boned and reassembled it looked as if it had jumped from the sea onto the fire. The seductions of its moist flesh, aromatic with fresh herbs, distracted me from asking about its provenance. (It was probably farmed, a personal no-no.)

I knew where the peppery "terrorized" dry-aged T-bone steak (\$35), charred on the outside and sliced vertically for easy eating, came from. Rose Pistola uses Niman.

From the antipasti section, seafood-stuffed grilled calamari (\$13) are actually little seafood sausages with squid as the casing. Shaved fennel salad adds a bracing, juicy counterpoint.

For dessert, have chocolate budino (\$7), a moist, pudding-like chocolate cake with a crisp, nutty praline bottom, topped with whipped cream.

For a large, bustling, noisy place, Rose Pistola really tries to keep service personal.

The wait staff are pros, but the tone is set by Robins, who one night curated a wine tour of Italy, egged on by my pal Laurel Hood, a winemaker and grower from Oregon. The two of them went wild, and we paid for it the next day. Robins told us she loves "watching people get it," which happens to be the motivation of so many who go into the business. Rose Pistola still runs on that energy.

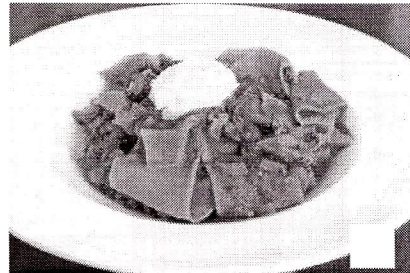
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Rose Pistola

Location: 532 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green streets), S.F.

Contact: (415) 399-0499; www.rosepistolasf.com

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday for lunch and Saturday-Sunday for brunch; 5:30 to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and 5:30 to 11



Terrific noodles: Pasta with brisket ragu is a standout dish at Rose Pistola. (All: Brian Molyneaux/Special to The Examiner)

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p.m. Friday-Saturday for dinner

Price range: Antipasti \$5 to \$15; pasta and pizza \$16 to \$18; entrees \$22 to \$36

Recommended dishes: Spaghetti with seafood sauce, linguine with brisket ragu, seafood stuffed calamari, wood-oven pizza, grilled whole branzino, chocolate budino

Credit cards: All major

Reservations: Accepted

URL: <http://www.sfexaminer.com/entertainment/2011/06/revitalized-rose-pistola-does-well-antipasti-dessert>