



# Let's Eat Vacaville

*a culinary perspective*

## Pietro's No. 2

by: Gigi Warshawsky

In keeping with the tradition of reviewing some of Vacaville's historic restaurants, we were off to Pietro's No. 2 for dinner. Pietro's No. 2 is owned and operated by Theresa Monteleone and her son, Joseph.

Theresa's family moved to Vacaville in 1956 when she was merely eight years old. The family's origins stem from Calabria in Southern Italy. She was raised, married and then eventually raised her own family here. This is home.

The restaurant was first opened in 1967 in its original location which was just two blocks down the road. In 1974, more space was desired; the restaurant was subsequently relocated to its present location.

Lynda and I arrived on a Monday evening. Large wine barrels and grape vines are situated as you enter the first door into the foyer. Through the second door into the restaurant there are the cashier counter and a view of the open kitchen with cooks making pizza. The walls are of Venetian plaster, more wine barrels and a wine rack. The dining room is on one side, filled with booths and tables. The ceiling is vaulted with a skylight and shingled clay roof awnings are accented above the booths. Added features include hanging plants, arched windows, a trickling fountain and various artifacts. "I feel like I am in an Italian courtyard", Lynda observed.

We were greeted and lead to the booth by our server, Rachael. She was very pleasant and made us feel comfortable. One nice touch, when Rachael observed that we were merely drinking water, she brought us a large carafe, so we would not have to wait for refills.

We realized that we had come on the "perfect" evening, as we were informed of the "Monday Night Special." This includes a New York Strip steak, soup and salad, fries or spaghetti and garlic bread. WOW! What a feast, this was a "must have." Italian food is my favorite cuisine and so many yummy options were offered on the menu, but how can one pass up such a bargain? Psst...on the dinner menu, the steak dinner runs \$23.95 and tonight, Monday, it was \$15.95.

Lynda decided on the Fettucini a la Romana, which consists of pasta with choice of sauce. Lynda chose the creamy white Alfredo sauce. The pasta was offered in two sizes; half order (\$11) or the full order (\$14.50). Since the larger size is accompanied by choice of soup or salad, that was the deciding factor. Another easy decision; more pasta and the addition of soup or salad, for only a little bit more. The ordering process was becoming extremely effortless.

And to enhance our selections, we added the Antipasto appetizer (small \$8.95 and large \$11.95) into the mix. If you have traveled to Italy, one of the best food experiences is all the Antipasto that comes before the meal. It usually consists of a wide display of grilled and marinated vegetables, cheeses, olives and salami and meats. Pietro's No. 2 assortment included fire roasted red peppers (fresh, not jarred), artichoke hearts (fresh, not jarred), cucumbers, sliced tomatoes, pepperocini, salami, ham and sliced cheese. The smoky flavor of the peppers and the vinegar and fresh herbs that complimented the artichokes were the stand outs. It was like a picnic on a platter. We even got culinary creative and took some of the salami and ham and added it to our tossed salads.

The house salads were really satisfying. It was a respectable portion of very crisp lettuce, sliced cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, pepperocini and croutons. The dressing came on the side, so it didn't drench the salad.

The Minestrone Soup was served in a medium sized bowl, unlike small cups that are so often the norm these days. The broth contained lots of fresh vegetables; carrots, celery, potatoes and cabbage. It tasted "fresh" and rustic.

The fettucini portion was enormous! Lynda adds, "It's yummy! Not too garlicky, very creamy without being too rich." I liked it because I could taste the pasta; the sauce was neither overwhelming nor overbearing.



After consuming the soup, salad, antipasto and garlic bread, my dinner arrived. You can only imagine how full my stomach felt when this 14-16 oz. steak was set in front of me accompanied with broccoli and bowl of spaghetti. I was perfectly content with all the food that was previously served, but then again, who can pass up a good beefy steak? The steak was extremely tender and very well seasoned. It was so flavorful, that when I put my staple A-1 Steak Sauce on it, I shoved the sauce away, it was much better without.

The broccoli was cooked nicely and also seasoned well. I had one bite of spaghetti, I was too stuffed. Needless-to-say, Pete, who was at home, became the lucky recipient of the majority of my steak and fixin's. As did Steve, with Lynda's meal too; we were two girls dining out and two husbands were happily feasting on the leftovers. So, in essence, the two meals became four.

By this time, we were stuffed to the gills! But somehow, somehow, we found an inch of space enough for sharing a dessert. The Tiramisu (\$5.75) was recommended and so be it. It was "homemade" and had to be the lightest and fluffiest Tiramisu we have ever eaten. Sometimes it can be so sweet and overly rich; but this was like heaven, light as a cloud. Later, as we talked with Theresa, we commented how wonderful the dessert was. Her secret: she soaks the Ladyfinger cookies in espresso and coffee liqueur and then adds whipped cream into pudding and mascarpone cheese as the filling and lastly a drizzle of Hershey's syrup on top. It was a perfect ending for a wonderful meal.

We thought our visit was coming to an end, but

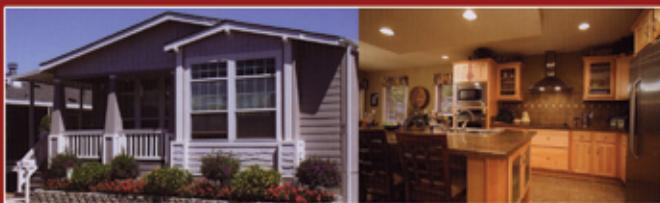


more surprises were in store. As we sat with the Monteleone's and talked about the restaurant and our meal, the sense of pride that enveloped Theresa and the enthusiasm that Joseph displayed were contagious. They shared stories and their love for the restaurant and its customers. I felt like we had just been adopted and now we were instantly Italian.

Theresa talked of her garden and how she grows her peppers and tomatoes. She emphasized that she makes all her sauces, dressings, the raviolis and gnocchi all from scratch from both her and her late husband Gino's family recipes and even grinds her own sausage for the pizzas. Not to forget, the ever important, freshly homemade pizza dough.

As we were enjoying the stories, suddenly Theresa told us to get up and before we knew it, we were embarking on a tour! Pietro's No. 2 is her pride and joy and she wanted to share the entirety with us. Lynda and I were immediately led by Theresa and Joseph through the door and were now behind the cook's line. We marveled as she showed us the pizza ovens and then opened up numerous drawers where quantities of pizza dough were proofing.

As we excused ourselves to the cook, who was still cooking meals, we entered the back room where the



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massive equipment was located. Here is where the dough is prepared, the sausage is ground and the pasta is made. In the walk-in refrigerator, large salamis hung on posts, below were shelves of fresh produce, pans of freshly made sauces and lots of grated cheese.

What was ever so apparent was how immaculate and spotless the kitchen was. I've been in the restaurant business for 30 years and have seen many kitchens in my day, from old to brand new. I was so impressed, not a speck of dust or grease, even on the fire sprinkler system over the hoods. With this attention to detail, stemming from the back of the house and reaching to the front; the diligence and meticulousness was quite evident.

As we were finishing up our tour, we exited from a door into the dining room and then were introduced to the Constatino family, father and two sons, who have been faithful customers for the past 37 years. What is even more impressive is that they live miles away in the Bay Area.

It just happened that someone wanted a calzone which was not offered on the menu. Theresa quickly accommodated and went into the kitchen to make this special order. As we were chatting with the Constatino's, this mammoth calzone was presented at the table. It was a feast for a family of four; I couldn't imagine how one hungry person would be able to make a dent in it. Hence, this is just one more individual touch from the Monteleone family in order to make their guests special ones.

There are a few other notable mentions. Not only do they offer the "Mon-

day Night" specials, but also "Tuesday Night" (Medium pizza with 4 toppings –large by other's standards, large spaghetti, family size salad and garlic bread) for \$28.95. If you do the math, that is a meager \$7.25 per person. And finally, the "Sunday Night Feast" (family size salad, spaghetti, ravioli and lasagna and garlic bread) for the same \$28.95.

There are banquet rooms that seat up to 100 people including a large screen TV, a quaint outdoor patio with a fountain, a separate to-go entrance which expedites the process for easy and efficient in and out service and if you are content staying at home, delivery service is available to all of Vacaville.

I could go on and on about the experiences that Lynda and I encountered; I do know that the both of us went home and immediately and quite voraciously shared the stories of the tour and calzone with Pete and Steve. But what speaks louder than words, Pete and I have now made Pietro's No. 2 a hang out on Monday evenings ever since my first visit.

I asked Mr. Constatino what he likes about Pietro's No. 2. He was quick to respond "I've come for 37 years, that speaks for its self!"

The Constatino's have been coming for 37 years and perhaps now many new families will make this restaurant a tradition also. Buon Appetito! ■

To sum it up... "Pietro's No. 2 is from the heart"

Pietro's No. 2  
679 Merchant St., Vacaville  
707-448-4588  
[www.pietros2.com](http://www.pietros2.com)  
Open daily from 11 am - 11 pm

