

News Clips Report

East of Italy serves traditional fare with New Orleans flair Advocate, The

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With the redevelopment of the Hammond Square shopping complex have come several new restaurants, among them East of Italy.

Its traditional Italian fare with a New Orleans twist. The restaurant's name stems from the fact that some of the owners hail from Vietnam.

Stepping into the foyer of East of Italy, one immediately notices its sleek and contemporary design. Walls in gold, brown and red span two floors, reaching to another level of tables overlooking the downstairs dining area. Dark red tables and black booths offer ample seating, while arched windows bring in lots of light. An accent wall features a recessed, back-lit shelf lined with colorful wine bottles. Original paintings hang near the ceiling. Clear glass surrounding the pizza baking area of the kitchen allows diners to take a peek while awaiting their meals.

On our first visit, at lunch, we started with an appetizer of stuffed mushrooms (\$7.95). The five mushrooms were filled with crabmeat and topped with alfredo sauce. The crabmeat stuffing was quite flavorful, but we found the sauce a bit thin. This made for a pleasing, although not outstanding dish.

We tried the Cajun crawfish pasta (\$13.95), which was accompanied by a Caesar salad and bread sticks. Offered a choice of pastas linguine, spaghetti, or angel hair we settled on angel hair, which was a generous portion. The seasoned crawfish tails were delicious, tossed in a spicy cream sauce with just the right amount of heat, along with chopped red onions and slices of jalapeno, a nice addition.

The generous salad, which also accompanied our dinner entrees on another visit, contained the freshest of romaine lettuce, croutons and grated parmesan cheese with a light and tangy Caesar dressing which we all enjoyed.

East of Italys breadsticks, two with each entree, are a bit different, more like flattened strips of French bread toasted and buttered. Quite tasty.

Also at lunch, we sampled the supreme pizza (small, \$11.95). A freshly-tossed crust of medium thickness held slices of pepperoni, black olives, mushrooms, Italian sausage, ground beef, bell pepper, onion and loads of cheese with a thin layer of traditional red pizza sauce. A well put-together pie, with everything tasting extremely fresh, this one was a winner. The plentiful amount of cheese without having to ask for extra cheese was an added plus.

On a dinner visit, we thought it a must to try East of Italys spaghetti (\$12.95). Given a choice of pastas, we again chose angel hair. The generous amount of pasta was covered in a light marinara sauce with chunks of tomato. It was a pleasing, mildly-flavored, thinner sauce than we were used to, but delicious nonetheless. Atop the pasta were two large, dense meatballs with finely ground beef seasoned with traditional Italian spices including basil. Chopped parsley decorated the rim of the bowl.

The parmesan tilapia (\$12.95) offered a large tilapia filet covered in parmesan bread crumbs and roasted. The tender, mild-flavored fish was wonderful, and we added a topping of sauted crawfish, a nice complement to the fish. Served alongside were roasted red potatoes with a blackened flavor we were divided on, and tender, steamed broccoli sprinkled with finely shredded parmesan cheese, which we liked.

The lasagna (\$12.95) was also a hit. Lasagna noodles were layered with well-seasoned ground beef, Italian sausage, marinara sauce and cheeses. The Italian sausage added that little something different, and loads of cheese held it all together.

For dessert we sampled the brownie sundae and chocolate tartuffe (\$6.50 each) and the tartuffe was the definite stand-out. The cake was a layered one chocolate cake below milk chocolate mousse, below white chocolate mousse, all topped with a chocolate glaze sprinkled with chocolate shavings. Have your eyes glazed over yet? Ours did. Service was attentive and efficient. We can also recommend the lemonade, refreshingly not overly sweet; and the iced tea, freshly

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brewed to a medium strength.

East of Italy

620 Palace Drive (Hammond)

PHONE (985) 345-2425

HOURS Open 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun.-Thurs., 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Fri. and Sat.

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