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Mambo Italiano
5165 Peachtree Parkway, Norcross. 770-441-3200

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OPEN FOR LUNCH and dinner since September, Mambo Italiano in the Forum Shopping Center in Norcross took over the space recently occupied by Brooklyn Cafe. But passersby looking for a glass of wine and a bowl of pasta in a pleasant atmosphere may not notice the change.

WHEN IN ROME: Mambo Italiano owners Angelo and Nicole Laios (who also own F.R.O.G.S. Cantina in Midtown) kept quite a bit of Brooklyn Cafe's original space. The look is stylish but relaxed, with an open kitchen, black-and-white checkerboard floors, dark wood booths and tables of various sizes (including several farmhouse tables). New is the baby blue Vespa parked near the front door. So are the huge photos of Charlton Heston and Mamie Van Doren riding the jaunty Italian motor scooters. Two clocks on the back wall are cleverly set six hours apart; one has a sign that reads, "Rome, GA" and the other, "Rome, Italy." A small bookcase near the bar holds an assortment of specialty items, including olive oils, pastas and sauces. And French doors open to an L-shaped front patio with wrought-iron furniture.

TRATTORIA MENU: The restaurant takes its name from the kitschy Rosemary Clooney song. But the menu eschews cuteness for straight-up trattoria-style fare, with a mix of starters, salads, pizza and pasta. Flatbread sandwiches, including chicken, ham and grilled eggplant, are served until 4 p.m. every day. There are also nightly dinner specials. Entrees include filet mignon with spinach and mashed potatoes, eggplant Parmesan, and chicken or veal marsala. Servers, dressed in jeans and Mambo T-shirts, are quick and friendly, if not overly attentive.

ANTIPASTI & INSALATA: Starters range from bruschetta and soup to carpaccio and calamari. Salads include caprese, mista, Caesar and grilled salmon. On a recent weeknight, we tried the Fritto Misto, a lightly breaded and fried mix of shrimp, bay scallops and calamari served with a bowl of mild marinara. The calamari (which can be ordered on its own) was tender and crunchy, but some of the scallops were a tad mushy and the shrimp had the vague iodine tinge of less-than-fresh. We liked the Greek Taverna-style salad, which, in lieu of lettuce, has chopped tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, olives and crumbled feta cheese, dressed with olive oil and a dash of vinegar.

PIZZA & PASTA: The Laioses installed a brick wood-burning oven, which they are putting to good use to

make 15 different pizzas and several calzones. Pizzas include basics such as Margherita (cheese, basil, tomato sauce) and pepperoni, and more exotic combos such as Frutti di Mare, a cheeseless pie with shrimp, scallops, calamari and mussels. We tried the prosciutto, which came with tomato sauce and mozzarella topped with generous, slightly tough slices of ham, fresh arugula and shaved Parmesan. We really liked the thin, crispy crust, which had a nice char and touch of smoke from the wood fire. A big bowl of penne arrabiata with black olives, garlic and anchovies was suitably spicy, but with too many bites left, we remembered that Brooklyn Cafe once served half-orders.

BAR, WINE & DESSERT: The full bar features an assortment of martinis, and there's a sizable selection of Italian and American wines by the glass and the bottle; most bottles are \$20-\$30. For dessert, there are all kinds of cakes, temptingly displayed in a glass case behind the bar, and a daily selection of gelato.

THE VERDICT: Mambo with the pizza, and mambo with the vino.

HOURS: Lunch: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays; noon-4 p.m. Sundays. Dinner: 4-10 p.m. Monday-Sunday

PRICES: Appetizers, soups and salads \$4.50-\$12; pizzas \$10-\$12; pastas \$10-\$16; entrees \$14-\$22; lunch sandwiches \$8

CREDIT CARDS: American Express, Visa, MasterCard

RESERVATIONS: Accepted

RECOMMENDED DISHES: Calamari Fritti, Greek Taverna salad, pizza

CHILDREN: Kids' menu

PARKING: On site

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes


SMOKING POLICY: Nonsmoking

NOISE LEVEL: Moderate

TAKEOUT: Yes

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