

Lost in translation

Genesia Tahilramani gives us her verdict on the new Italian restaurant **Serafina**

“Eating is a serious matter in Italy,” says the ubiquitous guide to Italian cooking, *The Silver Spoon*. It celebrates the seasons on a plate, emphasising fresh, local ingredients. This is not a cuisine that needs to take refuge in edgy, sometimes challenging taste-juxtapositions or elaborate charades with showy technique. It is enough to create the perfect pizza crust or a plump, translucent raviolo.

Our table at Serafina comprised of one couple back from two weeks of eating around Tuscany and another well-travelled couple. We're naturally curious (if slightly wary) of a restaurant whose big draw so far seems to be its NYC-motherhood-patronage by Lady Gaga, Kanye West and Kim Kardashian.

Serafina's casual décor and sprawling (by Mumbai standards) space are as welcoming as the sight of their wood-fire pizza oven and the cheery, cheeky 'Buono sera' you're greeted with by the maitre'd. That evening, patrons ranged from young hipsters, a family table of twenty to her ladyship Shobhaa De with husband Dilip. (A group of scruffy teens left after seeing the menu; but more on the pricing later.) The waiting staff was enthusiastic, polite, non-obtrusive and able to make suggestions on wine and food.

A bottle of Antinori Santa Cristina (₹3,500/bottle) was ordered and though served too cold for red wine, when it reached room temperature, it was perfect.

We began with the Bufaline Con Pomodori (₹795) — wedges of spectacular fresh mozzarella with Italian tomatoes; like a mouthful of a sunny day by the Arno! The imported ingredients had travelled first class. The Tartare Di Sofia (₹425), marinated tuna on toast, was also delicious. The middling Calamari (₹725), coating not crisp, slightly chewy with the 'homemade' tomato dip (more like leftover pasta sauce with no pique in it) however, was our first inkling that despite the generous portions, all would not be bellissima.

Experience has taught us that restaurants

pandering to the Indian palate results in Italian food losing its subtlety. We ignored Serafina's generous suggestion that despite it being traditionally 'al dente', they would concede to serving pasta 'well done on request'. We were also slightly supercilious about the lamb Bolognese (not traditional) and surprised at the lack of pork on the menu. Still, we struggled with deciding on entrées. Everything sounded so exciting, except perhaps, the mysteriously named D. Chopra salad — a mix of greens, pears, cherry tomatoes, walnuts, asparagus with a lemon vinaigrette.

My companion beat me to the Ravioli "Degli Innamorati" (₹745), which was heart shaped lobster ravioli in lobster bisque sauce. I ordered a Ravioli Ai Porcini (₹650), with porcini mushrooms and our friends decided to veer between the adventurous and the classic, Farfalle Ai Limoncello (₹675), with lemon zest and a splash of cream and a Pizza Di Fabio (₹1,285) with parma prosciutto. Big Italian style servings arrived but... the pizza sauce, reminiscent of the calamari dip, did not have the personality to adequately support the prosciutto. The Limoncello Farfalle was peculiar, an immature idea that still had to be finessed: no finish in the flavour. The Ravioli Ai Porcini was actually the best of all four dishes with a deep, earthy sauce and a firm, but delicate bite to each raviolo. The lobster ravioli was the disappointment of the evening. Tasting neither of lobster nor a good bisque, the sauce overpowered the delicate seafood and had the unmistakable stamp of a 'for Indian palates' over-seasoning. Chastened, we ordered the Tiramisu (₹595) which was the stuff of dreams; a quivering, perfectly made, square of deliciousness.

Serafina is *very* expensive. Haute-cuisine price tags, in a chain-restaurant with inconsistent authenticity, in a mall, is poor competition to some authentic Italian kitchens in Mumbai which are fairly priced. I may go back for just the wine, the mozzarella and the tiramisu, but I'd need Kanye West to say 'Ciao Bella' at the door.



>> Serafina's casual décor and sprawling space adds a warm vibe to the restaurant. (Bottom right) The portions are generous, but most of the food doesn't justify the pricing



Where Level 3, Palladium, Phoenix Mills, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel
Meal for two ₹6,000
Alcohol served Yes
Contact 40237711/ 40237712

>> Ayushi Shah's desserts are all eggless preparations



Where 27, Kazi Sayed Street, Opposite Hira Mistan Sweet Shop, Masjid Bunder
Contact 9867013315

BITE SIZED TREATS

There's something charming about mini desserts and that's exactly what **Icing on Top** offers. **Rhea Dhanbhoora** samples a few of the sweet treats

Ayushi Shah is taking miniature goodies and making them her specialty — but we're not complaining. The Icing on Top entrepreneur has made a business of tiny cakes, tartlets, shot glass desserts and cookies.

When the chocolate brown bags with a soft pink logo found their way into our office, our entire staff was pulled out of their afternoon slump with the promise of a sugar high. Presentation and packaging is lovely and Icing on Top delivers its goodies in specially created boxes that are as appealing as the goodies inside! The bigger cakes and some of the cookies are packed in boxes while smaller items come in tiny, clear plastic boxes.

Speaking of the treats that lay in store, we couldn't wait to sample the goodies and began soon, starting with the tartlettes. The Passion Fruit & Basil Seed (₹30) was very well made, but could have a bit more flavour punch. The Double Chocolate (₹30) and Hazelnut Praline (₹30) were well received by almost everyone at work.

The Red Velvet cakelettes (₹50), with its creamy icing and moist cake was definitely a favourite. The Double Chocolate (₹50), the Devil's Double (₹50) and Too Much (₹50) were neatly made with the right amount of sweetness. And all the desserts

were so moist! Quite a feat since the cakes had to travel a reasonable distance to meet us. However, the cakepops, while cute, were a bit stodgy.

Icing on Top makes good desserts, but if we had to order something, we'd opt for the cookies. From the Chocolate Chip + Hazelnut (₹400/kg) to the chewy Oaty Caramel Crunch (₹900/kg), we could have walloped down all the tiny treats in a single, greedy sitting.

The Lemon (₹1,000/kg) melt in the mouth and the citrusy burst added a nice edge. Everything from Icing on Top is eggless, and having sampled a variety of eggless desserts from many confectionaries, we're confident when we say that these are easily some of the best.



>> The cakelettes are priced at ₹50