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A New Italian Spot, Quartered in History



NOOKS Orto is in the historic Daniel Miller House, built around 1824.
Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times

By Joanne Starkey

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ERIC LOMANDO has done it again. The talented, young chef-restaurateur, responsible for the success of [Kitchen a Bistro](#) and [Kitchen a Trattoria](#), has added a rustic Italian spot in Miller Place to his collection: Orto.

His other places, both in St. James, continue to thrive. Kitchen a Bistro, which serves French/Mediterranean fare, opened in a tiny space in 1998 and moved into the former Mirabelle in 2009; Kitchen a Trattoria filled the space vacated by Kitchen a Bistro.

Orto, like the other two restaurants, does not accept credit cards. Like Kitchen a Bistro, it has a liquor license, but diners may bring their own wine, and many do.

The new restaurant, which opened in February, is in the historic Daniel Miller House, a lovely building from about 1824 that has been home to many restaurants, most recently Brian Scotts. The building gives Orto a number of small, charming dining areas: a nook with a table for two, a front room with four tables and a narrow space between the door and the bar with one long table for 8 to 10.

The main dining room, which looks as rustic as the rest of the house, with rough-hewn rafters, stucco walls and a corner fireplace, has a greenhouse-style glass extension. Floors throughout the building are plank or earthenware tile.

The food reflects the décor: rustic and earthy, with some innovative notes. The meal gets off to a good start with crusty bread from [Tom Cat Bakery](#), paired with assertive olive oil.

One evening the surprise appetizer hit was tripe. The tender scraps of meat were braised with tomato and crowned with Parmesan cheese. Even those who usually do not like tripe proclaimed it delicious.

A serving of three huge, tasty meatballs in a lush tomato sauce atop creamy polenta was homey and appealing. An opener of roasted cauliflower was also popular, although its [bagna cauda vinaigrette](#) was applied so sparingly that the dish seemed bland. White bean and kale soup sang with flavor; a salad of baby greens with pecorino dressing was fine but unexciting.

Diners may choose pasta as either a starter for \$12 or a main course for \$20. If spaghetti with clams is offered, go for it. The clams were plump and tender, the sauce bolstered with a flavorful roasted-garlic purée and red pepper flakes. The dish gets crunch from toasted bread crumbs and [sea beans](#), a marine plant that also adds a kick of freshness. Pappardelle Bolognese was flavorful and loaded with meat. Lasagna Bolognese was even better, with a creamy, cheesy topping.



Boneless pork chop with sunchokes. Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times

All the meat entrees delivered. A simple roasted organic chicken breast had a marvelously crisp skin and was served over roasted potatoes bathed in a salsa verde. It was so good we were still singing its praises days later. Another dish not to be missed is the grilled boneless pork chop, juicy and slightly pink at its center. It was sliced and served on a bed of roasted red peppers and fennel (since replaced by roasted sunchokes and onions).

Two meat pairings also made the grade: fork-tender lamb teamed with lamb sausage, and a meltingly soft duck leg confit served with a square of crisp pork belly atop a bed of chewy faro and a tangy cherry agrodolce (sweet and sour sauce).

Desserts are made in house and, with one exception, were very good. The best were a tangy lemon ricotta cheesecake, a satiny panna cotta, and hot, made-to-order doughnut nuggets served with a dark chocolate dipping sauce. The sole misstep was a tiramisù with an Amaretto flavor that we found off-putting.

There is nothing off-putting about this rustic spot with creative food, except the need to stop at an ATM (or bring your checkbook) to pay for dinner.

Orto

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Miller Place

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restaurantorto.com

DON'T MISS

THE SPACE Charming, historic house, built around 1824, with inviting small dining areas and an airy main dining room. There is a wheelchair ramp at a side entrance, and the restaurant is on one level; restrooms have no grab bars.

THE CROWD Casual, celebratory groups, including some children. The staff is generally attentive, although our server one night was often out of sight when we needed her.