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Orto



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Braised meatballs are served in a rustic tomato sauce over creamy polenta at Orto, a new restaurant in Miller Place. (March 17, 2012) Credit: Johnny Simon

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The road map of Italy in Eric Lomando's head takes you to places untraveled and tastes unexplored.

His mix of Italian, Italian-American and basically Lomandian dishes stirs up dining out in the neighborhood and miles around. Don't expect Orto to stay tucked away very long.

You'll find a cozy, countrified eatery, a four-way experience where there's a long, communal table as well as a niche that fits a table for two; a rustic little dining area plus an airier main space. They suit Lomando's eclectic cuisine.

You've sampled his very satisfying food at Kitchen A Bistro and Kitchen A Trattoria in St. James. These days, he's spending more time in la cucina di Miller Place, where the menu changes six times a week and the quality stays consistent.

Take a pasta tour. Consider the delicious raviolo of ricotta, mushroom and egg, an affair both fragile and full, loaded with flavor. Or his pleasing half-moon pastas filled with roasted beet and goat cheese.

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Maybe the hearty garganelli sent out in a pork-shoulder ragu; delicately twisted trofie with oxtail ragu; or the robust orecchiette with crumbled sausage and kale. Definitely the spaghetti with clams. Just skip the gnocchi or fusilli in a bland ragu "bianco" that features chicken and pork.

Try a trio of sauteed blowfish on creamy polenta that's flecked with nubbins of chorizo, and sample the roast cod with sunchoke puree and mushroom broth. Continue fishing with John Dory aswim in a fennel puree.

But don't get too far ahead. Before all these, slather lemon-seasoned fresh ricotta or sun-dried tomato tapenade on good bread. Bite into a crunchy semolina-fried chicken appetizer finished with blue cheese and mâche. Savor tomato-braised meatballs atop polenta. Slice the soap-bar-size slab of beef Milanese, crisp outside and flaky-tender within.

You can avoid the overdone roasted cauliflower "bagna cauda vinaigrette" and the routine baked clams; the standard lasagna Bolognese and the basic shell steak with sun-dried tomato vinaigrette.

Instead, go for a grilled pork chop with fennel and peppers, or sauteed duck with farro and sour-sweet cherries.

Orto has a respectable wine list and an outstanding policy on corkage. Bring your best bottle. They'll supply the corkscrew. Cost: zero.

To conclude: very creamy tiramisu, homey pear crostata, mellow orange-chocolate cake. The cannoli are dry; the warm doughnuts, hard irregulars shaped like oversize Brazil nuts. But the chocolate sauce almost makes up for them.

Orto refers to a small garden. This one is growing well, Lomando's way.



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