

# Valente's Cucina: Modern Italian Cuisine in Haddonfield, NJ

By **Jennifer Shafer** - January 2, 2022



If you are headed out to dine in a town with a high concentration of top-rated restaurants, odds are good that you will have an enjoyable meal. If you are going to open a restaurant in a town with a high concentration of top-rated restaurants, you have to be ready to turn out excellent dishes on a consistent basis to keep guests interested and returning. Haddonfield, NJ, is one of those towns and Valente's Cucina is *the* place to put on your radar!

My husband and I recently had the opportunity to dine at Valente's Cucina prior to a concert at the nearby historic Scottish Rite Auditorium. After witnessing how quickly the tables filled up, I consider us lucky to have scored a prime Friday night reservation at this hot spot.

## Small but Lively

A small space, the dining room is quite lively, with satisfied guests enjoying their meals and colorful artwork gracing the walls. The restaurant also utilizes the outside courtyard for larger parties. The night chill when we were there did not deter diners from sitting outside, as plenty of outdoor heaters kept things toasty as the season turned cold.



When we arrived, our server sat us and walked us through the night's selections. The menu is divided by course as Overtures, the kitchen's take on small-plate starters; Arias, an appetizing selection of house made pastas; and Crescendo, protein based entrees that change daily. The wine list features local bottles from Auburn Road Vineyards located in Pilesgrove. Guests also have a BYOB option.

## Local Wine



No matter where I am, if local wine is available, that is what I am ordering. We started the night out with a bottle of Animal Spirit Lioness wine from Auburn Road. This dinner-friendly red blend went incredibly well with each of our courses.



## To Start



For an appetizer, we chose the charred octopus served with pickled bell peppers, onions, and fried slices of fingerling potato. Our waitress explained that the the chef prepares the octopus in a sous-vide water bath earlier in the day. The charring happens upon ordering. Beautifully presented, the octopus was both perfectly charred and perfectly tender. The sprinkling of pickled peppers and onions created a balanced, tart-acid bite. This offset the rich seafood, while the fried fingerling potatoes added texture; the mustard wine sauce a bit of mellow heat and creaminess. If you have ever been disappointed by mediocre octopus this might be the redemption dish you were looking for!

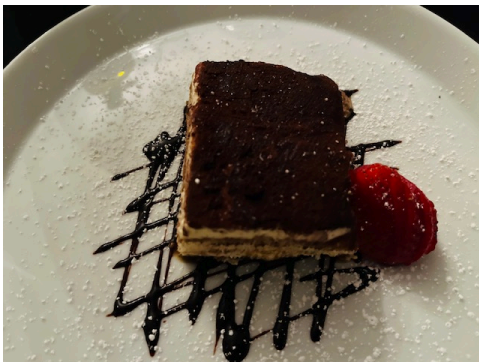
## Main Courses

Next, we ordered the crab fra diavolo over house-made squid ink pasta and the bone-in duroc pork chop served over mascarpone polenta and sauce agrodulce. The vibrant red fra diavolo sauce coated each piece of silky, inky black radiatori and had a nice spicy kick from Calabrian chili. Still, it allowed the sweetness of the crab to come through.



The duroc pork chop was nicely portioned and prepared with skill. The sweet-and-sour fruit sauce, along with the super creamy polenta, made for a delicious bite that I have craved ever since! I also have to mention the fresh bread basket, which comes with homemade compound butter. Our butter was enhanced with garlic and herbs and the slathered bread was an ideal vehicle for mopping up the fra diavolo sauce.

## Leave Room for a Dessert... or Two!



Choosing dessert was no easy task. Ultimately, though, we went with the classic tiramisu and chocolate bread pudding with coffee sauce and peanut butter ice cream. The tiramisu was creamy and light while the bread pudding was dense and decadent—if I had to pick a favorite I truly could not. Looks like you'll have to go decide for yourself!

Note: It was recently announced on social media that Valente's Cucina secured additional dining space in Kings Court, where the restaurant is located. No date has been set for the completed expansion.

### **Valente's Cucina**

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