
Restaurant review: Alina's Ristorante in Hadley



Alina's Ristorante in Hadley (*The Republican* | Michael Gordon)



By **Fran Bellamy** | **Special to The Republican**

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With the opening of Alina's Ristorante in Hadley this year, Chef Martin Amaya's career has come full circle. Amaya, who started working in area kitchens back in the early 1990s, had been the long-time executive chef at Carmelina's at the Commons. When that property came on the market, he took it over, creating an operation that reflects his own culinary vision.

Those familiar with Carmelina's will find the space little changed. Two dining rooms, one bright and open, the other more cloistered, define the layout.

The menu at Alina's is about Italian cookery viewed from a contemporary perspective.

Pasta selections include Crazy Alfredo (\$20), Fettuccine Gorgonzola (\$22), and Shrimp Scampi (\$24).

Rack of Lamb Marsala (\$29) features wild mushrooms in a wine-laced reduction, while Veal Saltimbocca (\$30) is perfumed with garlic and Chianti (\$30).

Daily seafood options can be requested in forms such as "al Pistachio" (nut-crust) or with lemon (both \$27).

Starter choices, which admirably forego the trite, range from Stuffed Zucchini Blossoms (\$11) to Beef Carpaccio (\$12).

Scallops Mare e Monti (\$12) paired two of our favorite foods -- scallops and mushrooms. The latter -- we'd guess they were shiitake-- had been sauteed before being infused with a lightly spiced citrus essence.

Three pan-seared scallops represented the marquee ingredient, and the combination served as a flawless way to start a dinner.

Our other starter selection was drawn from the restaurant's salad menu.

Beet Salad (\$9) featured paper-thin slices of Chioggia beet, an heirloom variety known for its multi-colored interior. Drizzled with an orange vinaigrette and garnished with crumbles of Gorgonzola cheese, the dish was an admirable interplay of sweetness and earthy pungency.

Carmelina's was one of the first restaurants locally to feature beef short ribs on its menu, and Chef Amaya continues to do so. His Brasato (\$24) had been slowly braised until the meat took on a silky, slightly gelatinous texture, while the Barolo wine used in the braising liquid added subtle fruity nuances to the rich beef flavor.

Served over risotto Milanese the short ribs were a dish that proved to be a bit hearty for hot weather enjoyment, but that was our miscalculation, not the kitchen's.

Risotto di Mare (\$24) was a precisely composed arrangement of mussels and baby clams paired with a seafood risotto of shrimp, calamari, and sliced Italian sausage. Infused with tomato and a hint of saffron, the risotto had a textbook-perfect consistency but was a shade saltier than we might have preferred.

One noteworthy house practice at Alina's is the availability of multiple portion sizes

A half-portion measure of Fettuccine Gorgonzola (\$16, full portion \$22) was more than adequate for our appetite, we discovered.

Lush and luscious, the dish featured chunks of beef tenderloin tossed with pasta, fresh spinach, sundried tomatoes, and soft-cooked garlic in a Gorgonzola sauce enlivened with a splash of grape brandy and tinted pink with a hint of tomato.

Salad's not included with entrees at Alina's, but bread, olive oil, and butter are. Those wanting some greens to munch on can content themselves with Alina's House Salad (\$6), a plate of mesclun topped with various garnishes and a choice of balsamic or cranberry citrus vinaigrette.

The wine list at Alina's is extensive, enumerating nearly a hundred selections. Reds predominate; prices cluster around the \$35 to \$50 range.

The bar also maintains an interesting assortment of craft beers and compounds its own distinctive beverage creations as well classic cocktails.

Dessert at Alina's means a choice from among four options - Tiramisu or Creme Brulee (\$8), a seasonal Fruit Tart (\$9), and a Mango Carpaccio con Gelato (\$8).

The Tiramisu was a stratified arrangement of ladyfingers and Marsala-infused custard; the Creme Brulee has both the requisite sugar-crust crackle and densely creamy custard.

Most interesting of the three was the Mango Carpaccio, a dish that used a sliced-thin approach to create a blossom-like arrangement of ripe mango.

A small scoop of vanilla bean gelato completed the presentation, which was both light and of a restrained, palate-cleansing sweetness we found to be a most suitable way to end a meal.

Name: Alina's Ristorante

Address: 96 Russell St., Hadley

Phone: (413) 584-8000

Hours: Dinner served Tuesday thru Sunday from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Entree Prices: \$19- \$30