



Taste

NEWCOMER



MANGIA E BEVI:
A bowl of seafood risotto diablo; the modern dining area; (opposite) the slushy Villa-O Roz-A-Rita.

ITALIAN

Pasta Boss

Robert Colombo does the big "O"—as in, organic.

By Teresa Gubbins

DALLAS HAS TRADITIONALLY been tight-fisted when it comes to pasta. Why pay for quality authentic Italian when you're knee-deep in cheap red-sauce joints? But organic—that's a whole other deal. It's "green," good for you, trendy. For this, for now, people will pay.

Enter Robert Colombo and Villa-O, his new pasta place in Travis Walk. Despite its unfortunate evocation of Spaghetti-Os, the "O" here is for "organic," the mission at Villa-O. They'll even escort you through the walk-in to show the O-word stamped on every produce case. They use environmentally friendly packaging, and just as they do at their sibling The Club, they have their own in-house sparkling water system, to avoid wasteful bottles.

The other intrigue in the kitchen in-

volves their method of cooking the pasta, lifted straight from Pei Wei: woks. This is fresh pasta we're talking about—made daily using organic flour, etc.—and fresh pasta takes just minutes to cook. So they pile it into a wok, add the sauce, and away you go. Pasta is the centerpiece and comes in all sorts of varieties—long ones, short ones, round ones, crazy ones. It's a pick-your-own deal. You pick a pasta, sauce, and meat or topping if you wish.

Let's cut to it: get rigatoni with Bolognese sauce. Rigatoni is the larger tube, and once cooked it caved irresistibly, with just the right soft-firm texture. Villa-O's Bolognese was a rich, meaty red with ground Wagyu beef, which made for a nice chew and—knowing its premium price—felt naughtily decadent.

Second choice: bucatini with turkey meatballs. The meatballs were light and spicy, and bucatini is the best pasta ever, like fat spaghetti with a hollowed-out core that absorbs sauce superbly. The hollow core gives bucatini a terrific al dente bite, but, more important, it provides you with the opportunity to place a strand in your mouth and suck in the air whilst giving your dining companion a saucy wink.

Do this at Villa-O and you'll fit right in.

Pizza was also quite good.

Like every other restaurant opening these days, Villa-O has a wood-burning oven. This means the potential for a fantastic pizza crust, assuming someone is carefully manning said oven; under the supervision of chef Vincenzo Indelicato, they seemed to have it nailed.

KNOX-HENDERSON
VILLA-O
4515 TRAVIS ST.
214-780-1880

All the toppings available for pasta—Italian sausage, roasted vegetables, grilled chicken—you can get on the pizza, too. The BLT ruled, with its gourmand goodies: San Daniele prosciutto, arugula, and tomatoes.

Regular entrees, not so much. They seemed kludgy. The steak, for example, called “steak pizzaiola,” was a 14-ounce New York strip

Despite its unfortunate evocation of Spaghetti-Os, the “O” here is for “organic,” the mission at Villa-O.

that got buried 6 feet under a heap of marinara sauce, roasted peppers, and mozzarella cheese. None of it masked the line of gristle in the steak. Seafood risotto diablo seemed like a good idea until the second it arrived and the realization hit that, oh yeah, risotto is almost impossible for anyone to get right. Ah well, there was at least a *lot* of rice. And, boy, this is definitely the dish for the person who simply cannot get enough squid.

Some sides and starters were memorably good, including fries made from portobella mushrooms, and eggplant rolletini, with thin slices of eggplant crusted in crumbs and rolled around a satisfying cheese and herb filling. Mashed sweet potatoes showed restraint, without the usual drenching of butter or sugar, so that the sweet potato flavor came through clearly.

This being a Colombo operation, Villa-O has a long list of well-made fruity cocktails, just like at Trece, its rather forlorn sibling across the street. The wine list boasts 50 Italian selections alone. They use Riedel’s stemless wine glasses, a good fit with the casual-elegant scheme. This being a Colombo operation, millions were spent on décor and fittings to give the former Samba Room space a boat theme. It’s all blues and whites and heavily lacquered woods, with handsome teak furniture giving the patio a jaunty feel—just in time for summer. \$\$-\$\$\$.

