



dish

No Faking

Villa-O
4514 Travis St., 214-780-1880.
Open 11 a.m.-midnight Sunday-Thursday,
11 a.m.-2 a.m. Thursday-Saturday. \$5-\$55

It's dedicated to the yearned for but often elusive O, subliminally, at least, judging by the comely scene coagulating around the sinuous bar—a cuff-linked wrist stroking a bronzed thigh, a French-tipped finger twisting in a belt loop one stool over. The crowd is lithe and sexed-up, dressed in jackets and clingy linens and cottons imprinted with rippled musculature, in micro-minis and Manolo and Jimmy Choo. It's another rich Dallas tableau, though this one with music wisely attenuated so

can instead of freshly boiled and peeled—tossed in a simple dressing of olive oil and lemon. The inauspicious Tuscan wedge turns in an organic chock of iceberg lettuce, more roasted peppers, organic tomatoes, chips of bacon (this would be stellar with hot, crisped pancetta) and two ramekins of dressing: a crumbled Gorgonzola and an Italian vinaigrette.

No organics were in the wood-fired Neapolitan pizzas with wispy crusts blanketed with an assortment of ingredients. BLT pizza is a twist on the fabled sandwich, this with San Daniele prosciutto (not pancetta, the cured Italian

are rampant. Words painted on the walls read "live to sail," "love life" and so on.

With all of these O's bubbling up, there must be wine. And Villa-O boasts a wine list—each entrant with brief sensory descriptions—of 50 wines under \$100 from every nook in the boot: Campania, Piedmont, Friuli, Veneto, Tuscany, Sicily and Abruzzo. The only exceptions are a pair of French Champagnes plus a sparkling rose keeping company with a pair of sparklers from Veneto. Each wine can be had by the glass, by the half bottle, or by the bottle, presenting what is an often scarce opportunity in these parts to explore and

calamari tentacles with clams and mussels assorted around the base.

Mediterranean mussels are cooked and served in a Staub pot and bathed in a tomato sauce richened with minced salami and invigorated with roasted green and red peppers. The shellfish were inconsistent, with a few unleashing that distinctive morning-mouth, swamp-water stench when bitten.

Pastas, wok-fired with sauces to forge and seal in flavors, are organized as short (rigatoni, penne) and long (spinach fettuccini, angel hair). You can select from a range of sauces, from Alfredo and basil pesto, to marinara and wagyu beef Bolognese. Doll everything up with extras that include organic grilled chicken, organic turkey meatballs, sausage and peppers, and organic vegetables.

We took the firm penne and paired it with the lush wagyu beef Bolognese. Seems a waste, this sauce roiling with frays and strips and flaccid chips of beef from the famed cattle, famously nurtured and husbanded into rich loins and other impossibly tender cuts laced with elaborate spi-



Villa-O's lobster seafood risotto may not be entirely organic, but who cares?

that the din of conversation and clanking flatware flows freely.

This is **Villa-O**, the latest from the Robert Colombo-Billy Solomon combination that begat Treece and The Club.

Billed as a "pasteria," the "O" latched to the Villa is for organic, but also for "original" and "oceanic." On the organic front Villa-O is a budding cornucopia of virtuous vittles: imported semolina wheat for the house-"crafted" pastas, organic vegetables as pasta "extras," organic carnoli rice for the risotto, organic tomatoes in the bufala mozzarella and tomato salad, organic bread crumbs crusting the clams oreganata. No mention of organic wines or organic vodkas for dirty, earth-friendly martinis. But there is a framed skull and bones in the bar.

Colombo set out to create one of Dallas' first green-minded restaurants. Forget for a moment that organic agriculture consumes more land and water resources than conventional agriculture (or that the quest for that other "O" in the bar wreaks havoc on freshwater fish populations via estrogen pollution from birth control pills). Colombo is earning the bulk of his environmentally friendly striping primarily through water. Villa-O has deployed a sophisticated carbon and UV filtration system to offer in-house purified water. It also has installed a system to offer house-gassed water for tableside sparkling water service, all the while eliminating nettlesome bottles and noxious shipping and delivery emissions. Yet the house-fizzed water doesn't seem to have the carbonic power of bottled waters. But with a lemon slice, the micro-fizz is still invigorating.

So too is the food, if you don't delve too deeply into the non-organic, non-pasta fronts. Mama Colombo's Italian salad is a blitzkrieg of colorful vegetation: lecherous red-orange tongues of roasted pepper and fluffy leaves of organic romaine, cucumber and artichoke—oddly from a

bacon?), organic arugula and tomatoes—light yet hearty.

Off the menu the "O" is for oceanic, picked up in the nautical décor. Blue and white awnings echo relaxed seaside motifs on the veranda, which is seamlessly married to its oceanic innards with large glassed doors serving as portals. Reddish stained slats of mahogany on floors and walls take cues from mahogany-hulled boats built by classic watercraft builders such as Chris Craft—a meticulously constructed model of one is posted on a nearby wine rack. Ribbons of aquamarine glass tile stripe the walls. Pictures of sailboats

tack down the stylistic characteristics and regional nuances that pack Italian dirt. You can pluck a San Crispino Brunello or an Oddero Barolo for a buck under a hundred, or sample a glass for \$35. What would swell the enjoyment during the sexed-up hours would be a wine bar experience with an assortment of 2-ounce flights.

Yet it would be a challenge to pair any of these 50 with the seafood risotto diablo (though the Enrico Prosecco Vento from the sparkling list might be a good shot). It's a mound of creamy carnoli rice engulfed in a vigorously spicy marinara, hooks of shrimp and bundles of snaking

Villa-O	
Mediterranean mussels	\$10
Tuscany wedge	\$8
Italian salad	\$7
Penne pasta/wagyu Bolognese...	\$13
BLT pizza	\$15
Seafood risotto	\$18
Fennel-crust scallops	\$18
Sorbets.....	\$7

der webs of marbled fat that bleed untold riches throughout the fibers when cooked just up to medium rare. But this beef was cooked to dusty gray, well past the point at which marbling could tingle the tongue.

Even more disappointing were the fennel-crust sea scallops over sweet basil vinaigrette, a courtship that simply didn't consummate. The scallops were rubbery and lacked that distinctive briny richness. The vinaigrette sweetness was more distracting than enhancing, casting the flavors at odds.

We finished with an assortment of fruity, tangy sorbets, which refreshed the tongue while washing away any residual organic pieties. Though it's hard to see what is so original about this place (house-gassed water, perhaps), Villa-O is undoubtedly one of the top simple pasta experiences in North Texas. It doesn't take reservations for parties of fewer than six, which can be confounding on weekends, but you can always nosh in the bar and try to match O's with your favorite patrons. To save the planet, of course.

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