

A Pizza You Can't Refuse at MAFIAoZA's

by Susan Swagler

MAFIAoZA's opened in Crestline Village about a month ago... This is the second restaurant for the Nashville-based eatery with a polished Mafia theme. The restaurant is attractive with old black-and-white photos and warm colors inside and a spacious patio with umbrella-topped tables outside that offer a view of the village. Pretty glass pendant lighting and walls of windows accent the large dining room.

And the food here is solidly good. Delicious pastas are cooked al dente; inventive pizzas are made with quality ingredients that are generously spread over a great-tasting crust; salads are nice and fresh; appetizers are unusual and tasty; and the wine menu offers wines that not only are new to Birmingham, but also new to the U.S.

Location is of the utmost importance to restaurants, and this one hit the jackpot with a neighborhood full of young families, many within walking distance.

Our youngest diner ordered a cup of peppery pasta fagioli (\$3.50). It featured kidney beans, pasta, Parmesan, tomatoes, carrots, onions, celery, bacon and quite a kick. The house salad and the Caesar salad (\$5.50 each) pleased with crispy, fresh greens and tasty dressings. The balsamic vinaigrette was nicely balanced, and the Caesar was good and garlicky.



The Tuscan Kiss pasta dish (\$12.50) was divine. This lasagna was made with tender pieces of chicken breast, slivers of sun-dried tomatoes, and a thick blend of ricotta, mozzarella and provolone cheeses. A hint of citrus flavor lightened the rich pesto cream sauce that held it all together.

The rest of us enjoyed pizzas -- whole and by the slice. All were great.

The choices are many, and you can create your own, of course.

On this initial trip, impressed with offerings that ranged from basil to blue cheese, we had them do the combinations for us... My husband and I shared a large "Last Request" (\$26), which is MAFIAoZA's ultimate topping pizza. This one was loaded with black olives, pepperoni, salami, Italian sausage, portobello mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes, plenty of garlic, extra cheese, green peppers, red onions and fiery slices of fresh jalapeno.

We started our meal with an order of MAFIAoZA's fried cheese ravioli sticks (\$7.95). These three large pieces were delightfully crisp outside and nice and gooey inside; we're now spoiled forever when it comes to cheese sticks. Our son liked his "Teamster" slice so much on the last visit that he ordered it again. It was as good as before.

My husband got a pasta dish called "The Joey" (\$11.50). Know this: When the MAFIAoZA's menu says something is spicy (and actually, the description said so six times), trust that it is. For all the heat, this was a great dish of spicy link sausage, juicy button mushrooms and still-crisp red onions tossed with angel hair pasta in a spicy vodka cream sauce. Delicious. And spicy.

I made a meal of Piccolo Morsi -- meats and cheeses. According to the menu, Piccolo Morsi translates to "a few bites." You can choose a combination of three spreads, cheeses or meats for around \$9 or five for \$13.50. I sampled salami studded with black pepper, mortadella with pistachio, a sinfully rich dip of mascarpone and artichokes, slices of drunken goat cheese and chunks of wonderful Parmigiano-Reggiano.