

restaurant review

Il Forno

508 Nagog Park (Route 2A) • Acton, MA 01720
978-263-5311 • www.il-forno.com

Reviewed by Barbara Beaudoin

In Italian, Il Forno means “the oven.” It is the wood-fired brick oven in this Acton restaurant that is used to create many of the traditional northern Italian dishes with some innovative twists. The restaurant’s warm and friendly atmosphere is reminiscent of family-owned trattorias common throughout Italy. Il Forno serves generous helpings of Italian comfort food: gnocchi, lasagna, veal Parmigiana, baseball-sized meatballs, and brick-oven baked pizza. Its BYOB policy is popular and makes dining out affordable for families. There is no corkage fee, and diners can enjoy their own beer or wine at a fraction of the usual cost of ordering from a restaurant menu. That must be why I saw several family groups on a recent Thursday evening, including one whose lucky Mom enjoyed a birthday celebration. The dining space accommodates about 75, and by 6:30 p.m. the room was nearly filled. The large parking lot assures easy parking, even on a busy weekend.

In space that once was Livorno’s Pizzeria, Michael Mohammed’s Il Forno Acton restaurant is now operated by Michael and Christine Page with the same talented chef and many of the same friendly and efficient wait staff so the transition is hardly noticeable. Joining the trio of Il Forno restaurants—Acton, Fitchburg, and Westboro—is the newly opened Worcester location. More information can be found on the website www.il-forno.com, offering menus, catering services, and online ordering.

After a warm greeting from the hostess, we were led to our table, and offered a basket of hot, grilled garlic bread. The server opened our wine, and explained the evening’s specials. On this visit, my husband was hard-pressed to decide between two offerings: Rack of Lamb Marsala with mushrooms, hot cherry peppers (or without, for less heat), sun-dried tomatoes, over butternut squash ravioli (\$24.95) or Stuffed Ribeye Steak and Grilled Shrimp (\$25.95). The fork-tender grilled steak won out; it was stuffed with roasted red peppers, asparagus, and smoked mozzarella cheese, in a burgundy wine sauce with wild mushrooms, presented over several large ravioli filled with spinach and portabella mushrooms. A simple dinner salad accompanied each entree; tall bottles of Italian and Creamy Italian dressings are available on each table.

I had planned to avoid a heavy dinner and ordered from the appetizer menu. First, a cup of homemade Tuscan soup, with escarole and white cannellini beans in a thin flavorful broth, followed by stuffed mushrooms, and a salad. To my surprise, these were not the usual “small plates” of appetizers. The Mixed Baby Green Salad filled a dinner plate with fresh greens, baby spinach, strawberries, walnuts, cranberries, and cubes of a sweet cow’s milk cheese (from Wensleydale Creamery, Yorkshire, UK) filled with Ocean Spray cranberries (\$10.95). With a drizzle of balsamic vinegar, it was a light and fresh spring-like combination. Seafood Stuffed Portabella Mushrooms were two 3-inch diameter portabellas in a lobster meat cream sauce (\$10.95). It was all so good, but next time I’ll inquire about portion size (well, maybe not).

Dessert was unavoidable after the waitress showed us the selections. Most desserts are not made on site, but from the Cheesecake Factory. We shared a lighter-than-usual mousse-like version of raspberry swirl cheesecake on a chocolate crumb crust, topped with mounds of airy whipped cream (\$5.95). The tiramisu and homemade cannoli are other delicious finishes to a rich meal.

The menu is extensive, with many heavier dishes including pasta, cheese, and red sauce for those who crave it. However, you can also experience meat and seafood dishes with lighter sauces of olive oil and garlic, or white wine and lemon, such as the Chicken or Haddock Francese. With a large variety of toppings available for brick-oven pizza, I also noticed a brisk take-out business during our recent visit. On Sundays and Wednesdays, be sure to try the take-out special of two large Margherita pizzas for \$14.95.

By the way, the other special offered during our visit—Rack of Lamb Marsala—received two thumbs up and an “awesome” from two diners at a nearby table who had selected it.

The wait staff is especially helpful in explaining ingredients, food preparation, and discussing adjustments to the seasonings if you ask. A friendly atmosphere, efficient service, and quality ingredients make Il Forno a good value for singles, couples, and families. Call-ahead seating is recommended on weekends, and because tables are arranged for smaller groups of two and four, it’s wise to request reservations for large parties. ■

restaurant report card

restaurant name	Il Forno					
atmosphere	family	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	fast-food	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	adult	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	kid-friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>		
theme	Northern Italian, BYOB					
menu	breakfast	<input type="checkbox"/>	lunch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	dinner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
cost of food	Pizza 49.95-\$15.95					
recommended dish	Grilled Ribeye Steak					