



Cibo pulls off impressive Italian job

West Coast meets Italy without the jet lag

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It's been a long time since we encountered a new room with such confidence and integrity on the plate as found at Cibo. But perhaps it should come as no surprise. Both the edgy, contempo-retro space, as well as its neighbouring Uva wine bar, are very much under the control of ex-lumiere GM and sommelier Sebastien Le Goff, who departed the West Side star during its last Feenie-less gasps to help oversee the Dufferin Hotel's transformation.

We'd already discovered Uva's happening scene and were taken with the eclectic offerings at Viti Wine and Lager Store (beyond wine, think over 80 single malts, craft ales, ciders and a clutch of meads). But what we weren't ready for was the extreme culinary finesse of the newly opened Cibo--the last piece in the puzzle of this boutique hotel trio.

"This is the best Italian food we've tasted outside of Europe," chortled our overseas table mates (including a French restaurateur), who couldn't believe their good fortune as plate after plate arrived.



Ex-lumiere GM and sommelier Sebastien Le Goff has a culinary winner on his hands with eclectic and adventurous Cibo Trattoria.

Photo-Tim Pawsey

The parade from the kitchen under Londoner and River Café alumnus Neil Taylor started with an impossibly delicious brodo, with perfectly textured chicken and mortadella tortellini and black truffle--truly a harbinger of things to come.

Crunching into cod-stuffed, deep-fried zucchini flowers and trying to be unselfish while sharing aioli-teased Dungeness bruschetta, we found ourselves wondering how so many trendy Vancouver kitchens can get away with putting out more of the same "West Coast" yawns, when there are tastes like this around.

The room itself, more sleek than cozy, has a pleasing edge. Oversized silk screen paintings add a dramatic touch, while the chrome and glass contemporary furnishings are balanced by the terracotta tile floor, restored in all its colourful glory.

It's the kind of place where you want to linger over the tantalizing menu while sipping on prosecco tweaked with Campari and fresh pineapple juice--which is precisely what we did.

Le Goff and consultant Murray Bancroft lured Taylor from his home town, where the chef had returned after a stay in Sydney--a coup that should have some more high profile owners drooling.

Taylor and Le Goff are fanatics for freshness: it shows on a menu that shifts by the week, if not the day. There's not much on this list we wouldn't pass up on our return. Standouts range from the pink-grilled squab (marinated in Vin Santo and served with crispy pancetta, chanterelles and baked artichoke), to the intriguing grilled puffball mushroom with peppers and herb salad, and extraordinarily rich spinach, ricotta and porcini rotollo.

Taylor's style is authentically pan-Italian with a hint of West Coast. But there's nothing fusion-esque about these plates, which are thoroughly grounded in local ingredients and constructed with an honest, uncomplicated flair.

Our only slight disappointment was a bag-baked halibut that seemed under-cooked. But any letdown quickly evaporated with a taste of the River Café intense "Chocolate Nemesis" and creme fraîche.

Prices are well within "downtown" range--\$14 to \$34--and very fair, given the ingredients and depth of preparation. Also worth noting is the pre-theatre \$38 prix fixe, which makes this spot (across from the Orpheum) a shoo-in for symphony and opera-goers.

All this, along with great glass, polished service and Le Goff's informed take on Italian wines and friendly music means we'll be booking our return trip. Very soon.