



EAT BEAT

by Martha Wagner

Italian Restaurant Update ... plus Picnic Pleasures

Most everyone loves a picnic. Food always seems to taste better when laid out on a picnic blanket or taken out of a daypack in a beautiful outdoor setting. You can rush through a meal indoors, but picnics are meant for slowing down, for slowly savoring the pleasures of good food and the outdoors.

Picnics can be as simple as a meal of take-out deli food eaten on a park bench. What makes a really memorable picnic, though? Last week I put this question to several Eugeneans who enjoy making a production of picnics.

For John Hurst, a former cooking instructor who now works as a restaurant consultant and graphic artist, "A great picnic is when you do the unexpected. You use fine china and crystal, sit on a beautiful quilt and bring along fresh flowers and sun umbrellas. Or the place itself can be the element of surprise. The way they picnic in France is to just pull off the road in a pretty spot and set up a picnic close to the road—not a freeway. I used to do this on Prairie Road."

When it comes to menu planning, Hurst considers several factors. "Color is especially important in the outdoors. I like grilled vegetables for this reason. I also like Middle Eastern and Greek food because they're not messy to eat and they don't need to be hot or chilled. If there are enough people to help, I'll bring along an ice cream maker and we'll make ice cream for dessert."

Anyone for Exercise?

For some picnickers, churning ice cream is exercise enough; for others, exercise is part of the formula for a great picnic. "I like to hike up Mt. Scott, then the food tastes all the better," says Gayle Jolley, owner of Edibles, a catering business.

Jolley considers fall the ideal picnic season. She likes a picnic of French bread, cheeses and fruit, but also has a favorite fall meat dish for picnics—prune and apricot stuffed pork loin roasted with rosemary and sage. "It's better eaten cool than warm."

Register-Guard reporter and picnic enthusiast Carolyn Kortge loves the adventure aspect of getting to a glorious picnic spot. She admits a preference for sharing picnics "with people adventurous enough to drive to the coast or hike three miles to the top of Mt. June."

Inspired by visits to a health spa, Kortge and her husband, Dean, are experimenting with a leaner cuisine for picnics this summer. "For one picnic we made roll-up sandwiches with large Ak-Mak crackers and two fillings: one, a tofu salad, the other, sliced turkey breast with onions and a mixture of ricotta cheese and yogurt. We also like salads a lot, such as turkey or chicken salads."

Kris Neilson has served champagne brunches in farmers' fields, following the touch down of the hot air balloon she and her husband used to pilot. A long-time river rafter, she's also developed a reputation for one-of-a-kind rafting picnics.

Pick a Picnic Theme...

Neilson loves a picnic with a theme, a picnic she can approach from her background in art. Last month she supervised a crew of volunteers in creating an "East meets West" picnic beside the McKenzie River for 35 participants in The Common Foundation's annual fundraising float trip.

"Ron Mattson, the Yangtze River explorer, was coming on the trip so we decided on the East West theme. He brought back from China a wood block which we used to make 50 prayer flags for our picnic site. We

strung them in the trees. We had cloths on the serving tables in red and gold, the colors of the Chinese flag."

The outing menu included wontons; Ron Mattson's wok fried rice, vegetarian and pork; several salads; baked chicken wings; and Chinese tea eggs—marbled, smoky-flavored hard-boiled eggs prepared by gently cracking the surface of the cooked eggs to form fine lines, then steeping the eggs in black tea seasoned with soy sauce and star anise.

East met West at the dessert table where rafters found more familiar edibles: fruit tarts and pies, chocolate chip cookies, chocolate tortes and more.

The raft trip took place July 18, the day of a down-pour, but Neilson said it barely dampened the rafters' spirit of adventure. It was just another way to enjoy what she likes best about picnicking—"getting out of your everyday routine."

Two new Italian restaurants have opened recently in Eugene, each offering a sophisticated, updated interpretation of that cuisine.

Provati Ristorante, located in the former Old Susanah's location in Oakway Mall, offers lunch and dinner menus that reflect Italian inspiration, but take advantage, says chef Paula Scharf, of many local ingredients—fresh herbs and produce, seafood, etc. The restaurant produces its own smoked meats and poultry, featured in such dishes as Smoked Chicken Cannelloni and Smoked Duck Pate.

Lunch and dinner menus each offer several choices of individual serving pizzas, a good variety of pasta dishes and other entrees, hot and cold antipasti and several salads. Desserts are anything but ordinary. The list includes Mascarpone and Raspberries, a slice of pound cake topped with the creamy Italian cheese, surrounded by raspberry puree. Menus will change seasonally.

Provati, owned by the Eugene-based King's Table restaurant chain, has two dining areas: a black, red and white bistro for informal dining, and a carpeted, two-level formal dining area decorated in pastel shades.

A pasta and salad lunch averages about \$8. Dinner pasta dishes start at \$5.50, other entrees range from \$8.50 to \$14.00. Dinner reservations are advised.

Ambrosia, located in the former Accuardi's Old Town Pizza building, 174 East Broadway, exemplifies the bistro restaurant, considered one of the hot new trends in the restaurant industry. Menu is a la carte, decor is informal but stylish, prices are moderate.

Although the menu includes numerous salads, appetizers, pasta dishes and other entrees, pizza is a specialty at Ambrosia. This is Eugene's first wood-fired pizza, baked over oak in a special oven imported from Italy. The oven, located in view of customers, is of a type used for hundreds of years in Italy, according to Zareh Marashlian, one of the owners. (Also a partner is Frank Ernandes, owner of Mazzi's and Marco's Gelato d'Italia.)

The oven, says Marashlian, imparts special flavor and texture to the eight pizzas and two calzones served at Ambrosia. The individual serving pizzas come plain and simple (tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, fresh basil) or all dressed up with such ingredients as fresh tomato, havarti, provolone, prosciutto, fresh basil and Nicoise olives.

The menu, which will change seasonally, tends toward the Northern Italian, but there are non-Italian surprises, too: calzone and pizza with brie, fresh salmon baked in parchment, etc. Desserts include gelato, fruit sorbets, and the Italian pastry, cannoli.

Pizzas start at \$3.75, pasta and entrees are \$6.25 to \$12.50. Ambrosia will begin serving lunch later this month.

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