

Strength in Flavors

Penelope's puts its best foot forward.

If you're a fan of the robust, pungent flavors of Mediterranean food, you owe it to yourself to swing by Penelope's, the new restaurant in the old home of Locomotive. While there are still a few bumps and quirks hiding out on the menu, the small, friendly restaurant deserves more patrons than the four of us who were there last Saturday night.

What Penelope's does well, it does very well. Our appetizer, a sampler plate of spreads with toasted pita triangles on a bed of diced tomatoes and hearts of romaine, had us cooing and proclaiming favorites instantly. The eggplant spread, piquant with garlic, and the salty puree of kalamata olives took top honors, though the feta was also delicious and the hummus just fine (if a bit pedestrian in comparison with the rest of the plate). Our pitas were replenished and another basket of homemade bread brought before we'd even thought to ask.

The small wine list was dubbed "well-organized and full of value" by the most knowledgeable of our party, and our 2003 Barbara d'Alba stood up nicely to the array of flavors we'd selected. The Mediterranean combo platter was irresistible, a large plate loaded with moussaka,

keftedes (heavily spiced lamb meatballs), spanakopita (slightly disappointing, with damp filo dough) and dolmades. A full order of the moussaka proved to be a little heavy; while the lamb (locally raised) and eggplant were flavorful and cooked to perfection, the layer of béchamel custard that topped the dish was a little thick.

Scampi Mediterranean was good if unremarkable, though the rice and vegetable sides were a perfect companion for the garlicky shrimp. But the real winner was the peppered tenderloin flambé, a sizable slab of filet mignon topped with crushed peppercorns, cooked in a brandy cream sauce with fresh mushrooms and served with a choice of rice or potatoes. The rich, decadent sauce would have made cardboard taste good.

Sadly, our post-entrée selections were on the disappointing side. The chocolate hazelnut mousse torte's cake layers were dry as styrofoam, and the "organic espresso coffee" lacked both crema and flavor.

While Penelope's might draw more patrons by adding a slightly less expensive lunch hour and using a lighter hand with the béchamel, their short but diverse menu has broad appeal. **ew**

**Penelope's
Mediterranean
Cuisine**
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Wednesday through Sunday.
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