

An evening at MyCovio's



Photos by David Campiche

Willapa Bay steamer clams is the perfect accompaniment to a perfectly cooked spaghetti.



LEFT: Fettuccine with alfredo sauce and shrimp, slathered with Parmesan cheese. MIDDLE: Gently poached seafood in an Italian-based cioppino. RIGHT: Thin spaghetti with house ground beef chuck, toasted ground fennel seeds, Walla Walla sweet onion, garlic and 'killer tomato sauce' finished with Parmesan.

A sophisticated Italian restaurant on the Long Beach Peninsula

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

Paul Klitsie is a big Dutchman with solid, strong arms and large hands. Those hands move like a violin player with both delicacy and soldier-like precision. Klitsie loves to cook.

He crossed the Atlantic as a young man and haunted the restaurants in Portland, rising, some years later, to modest fame at his Ristorante Fratelli in the Pearl District, and then at Willem's, preparing modern comfort food in Vancouver, Washington.

Food was a love affair even before he left the lowlands and picturesque canals of Holland. In Amsterdam, he plied his early skills at Vasso. Like the Dutch and Flemish artists of the Northern Renaissance, Klitsie was a man on a mission.

Perhaps because of the closeness to water and fond memories of the Netherlands, he fell for the Long Beach Peninsula, and Ocean Park in particular.

Klitsie recognizes the natural beauty of the Northwest beaches and extolls in the bounty of fresh seafoods, mushrooms, berries and fresh produce.

His job is to bring all the lovely things to life. He walks his two dogs on the beach every morning, come rain, come shine, and refuses to complain when the weather is uncomfortable. He simply dons a rain coat and hat, and marches on with courage, rain in his face.

His style — though trained in French cuisine — is Italian. The results are masterful.

What I learned from Ron and Carrie VanDyke through the years, is what anyone should quickly notice at MyCovio's: Klitsie pursues perfection, and his staff reflects that as well.

MyCovio's is a small but pleasant space, located just east — a stone's throw — from the Ocean Park approach. On a night when the ocean sky was dispensing crimson and rhododendron-colored fireworks, we were led to our table by an accomplished

server and there began our splendid repast.

There was a lot of pasta on the menu. Thin spaghetti with farm-raised vegetables. Fettuccine with alfredo sauce with choices of chicken or shrimp. Lasagna and thin spaghetti with garlic, Italian parsley and fresh Willapa Bay clams.

And there was a rich and meaty ragu, on — again — thin spaghetti, and with a self-described "killer tomato sauce." Of course, all the pasta was topped with fresh grated Parmesan.

I settled on a cioppino, resplendent with fresh, tender seafood: salmon, scallop, shrimp and fresh Willapa Bay clams. That killer tomato sauce was indeed a killer.

I could feel my arteries pulsing. One can't begin to make a cioppino or a bouillabaisse without a great red sauce. Klitsie's was full-bodied, rich in tomato and wine and his savory spices, probably oregano, Italian parsley and basil.

Somewhere along the line, magic happened; the dish was divine with the seafood poached to perfection. The appetizers were simple and heartwarming (Italian simplicity with the freshest and the best): the bruschetta, two varieties, one rich with garlic, Parmesan and, in the second case, salted cashews, dates and gorgonzola dressing.

The daily salad rallied behind us at another table and looked wonderful highlighted with feta and honey glazed macadamia nuts.

We passed on a sous vide New York strip steak with a rosemary risotto, mascarpone and a plum balsamic reduction. One can only eat so much, even when it is special.

We did save room for desert, with two options. A delicate panna cotta was finished with basil and lemon and melted like a sublime kiss in the mouth. The tiramisu (non-traditional) was finished with a powered chocolate and a light caramel sauce.

My only disappointment was that I couldn't get a cappuccino, for me, the perfect finish to a great Italian meal. And if one can't sleep hours later because of the caffeine, well, he or she could toss and turn in the recent satisfaction of the fine meal.