

At South End's Mida, serving charm with the handmade pasta

By **Devra First** GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 23, 2016

Where to Mida, the first solo restaurant from chef Douglass Williams, who has worked at the likes of Coppa, Radius, and Corton in New York.

What for Italian-influenced food in a sweet little South End spot (previously Cluckit and Estelle's).



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

The scene The restaurant is tiny and convivial. Friends toast at two-tops; couples and solo diners belly up to the L-shaped bar. In the open kitchen, Williams and crew prepare small plates and pasta dishes. The soundtrack alternates between Dream Academy and hip-hop. The aesthetic is clean and warm: cream paint and black banquettes, with a few eye-catching lighting fixtures for interest. And the lighting is just so, dim enough to flatter but bright enough to read the menu by.

What you're eating Fried golden ovals of bluefish bacalao, with olive aioli and roasted lemon paste. An assortment of greens, delightfully charred, in a lightly spicy vinaigrette. Lamb ribs with Luxardo, dill, and crispy ginger. Handmade pasta, from ricotta gnocchi with kale, sunchokes, Parmesan, and bread crumbs to orecchiette with duck confit. Larger plates featuring roasted parsnips and octopus; duck breast with sweet potato, braised red cabbage, turnips, and ginger jus; and more. The dessert list is short and halfway sweet: citrus-poppysseed cake or cheese.

Care for a drink? There are cocktails both Italian-ish — the Mida spagliato, a variation on the theme of Negroni — and not, plus thoughtful wine and beer lists. A short selection of aperitivi makes for welcome pre-meal sipping.

Overheard Women asking dashing servers to take their pictures, discussions of food deprivation, and oohing over toothsome pasta. “You’re going to love these,” promises a server with an elegant French accent, dropping off an order of lamb ribs at one table. Another dish follows: “And these are wet towels to wipe your fingers!” The rib eaters exchange glances and laugh: Things are about to get messy. “It is annoying! It is really annoying!” declaims one gentleman, angrily sipping something scarlet with Campari. “When we came here to this country from Russia, there was never any food,” one man tells a friend. “So when we go to these restaurants, we always order too much food. I have such a problem leaving food on the table.” Another table is having the experience of too much food, as well. “Excuse me. We didn’t order this,” one woman says, flagging down a server. “It was an on-purpose mistake,” he tells them, smiling. “I want you to try it.”

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