



SIMPLY ITALIAN

FRESH INGREDIENTS MAKE THE BEST DISHES

BY AMANDA FLATTEN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT CALLAHAN

Anita Riccardi, owner of the Uptown Italian restaurant Riccardi's, knows authentic Italian food. She and her husband, Gaetano, opened Riccardi's in April 2005. Both are chefs passionate about food.

The restaurant, which enjoys a great reputation and loyal customers, offers a menu of dishes you would find in various regions throughout Italy. "We offer mostly my husband's recipes from his home town in southern Italy and places all over Italy that we visit," Anita says. "My husband is Italian and he's a chef, so he knows what the food is supposed to taste like. I think our food is the most authentic of any [Italian] restaurant in Dallas."

Anita says she wanted her restaurant to have a comfortable yet elegant atmosphere. Decked out with dark wood floors, cream stucco walls and a Sistine Chapel mural on the ceiling, the restaurant has a decidedly Italian feel. Other than the main dining room and bar, a cigar lounge with a full bar and four flat-screen TVs welcomes visitors who want to relax, watch sports and enjoy a drink. There also are two private dining areas, and a welcoming covered patio.

"A lot of people call our place 'Upscale Cheers' because everybody knows your name — it's that kind of place," Anita says. "There aren't many places you can go and feel that way."

Signature dishes include Stuffed Quail, Carpaccio, Veal Gaetano and Mostaccioli Carbonara, and the lasagna is an all-time favorite. "Our lasagna is probably the best in the world," Anita says. The couple also owns a vineyard in Italy. After the grapes are hand-picked, the wine is shipped to Dallas by the container and served in the restaurant.

Simplicity and fresh ingredients are the cornerstones of great Italian cooking, Anita says. "A lot of people visit Italy, and they always talk about the food," she says. "I think what makes the food so good is that it's very simple and Italians use whatever ingredients are fresh from their region. The Italians know about freshness, and that is what we try to provide — basic food done right."

Exceptional home-cooked Italian meals can be made in a short amount of time, according to Anita. "Italian food is easy to put together, although it's a day-long event to eat the Italian way," she says. "Italians are so passionate in the things that they do, and they have such passion for food. Their existence is based around food. When I think of Italian food, I think of happy times. It brings bring people together."

All recipes are from Anita Riccardi of Riccardi's, 2800 Routh St., Ste. 115, Dallas, 214.303.0881, www.riccardis-dallas.com.



Panzanella Salad

Serves 2

Handful of pear tomatoes (or your favorite tomatoes), cut in halves
 2 2-ounce fresh mozzarella cheese balls, cut into large cubes
 1/4 loaf Italian bread, slightly toasted and cut into large bite-size cubes
 1/4 cup olive oil
 1 tablespoon fresh basil
 Salt to taste
 Pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients in a bowl and toss with olive oil, basil, salt and pepper. This makes a great spring or summer salad.

Lamb Rack *Serves 1*

LAMB

1/2 lamb rack — 4 chops
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 Salt and pepper to taste
 2 tablespoons mixed herbs (equal amounts of oregano, rosemary, thyme, sage and parsley)
 3 tablespoons olive oil

SAUCE

1 tablespoon olive oil
 3 tablespoons finely chopped shallots
 1 clove garlic
 2 teaspoons mixed herbs
 1/2 cup Gaetano di Forino Greco di Tufo white wine
 1/2 cup veal stock
 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

TO MAKE THE LAMB: Into a hot skillet, add olive oil. Sear the lamb rack until it's nicely browned. Spread the lamb with mustard, salt and pepper and 1 tablespoon of the herb mixture. Place in oven and cook to desired temperature (we prefer medium to medium rare). Set aside to rest while you make the sauce.

TO MAKE THE SAUCE: In one pan, sauté shallots and garlic until translucent and add the mixed herbs. Add the Greco di Tufo white wine. Let the wine reduce by half to about a 1/4 cup. Add veal stock and reduce by half to about 1/4 cup. Remove from heat and swirl butter cubes into sauce until blended. The sauce is ready to serve. Slice lamb into chops and serve with sauce and your favorite accompaniment.



Berries Alla Zingaro *Serves 6*

ZABAGLIONE

8 large egg yolks
 1 cup confectioners' (powdered) sugar
 1 cup dry Marsala
 1/4 cup heavy cream

ALMOND TUILE CUP

1/2 cup sliced almonds
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 1/4 teaspoon pure almond extract
 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 1 egg white
 1 teaspoon unsalted butter, melted
 1 cup strawberries, sliced
 6 whole strawberries for garnish
 1 cup raspberries
 1 cup blueberries

TO MAKE

ZABAGLIONE SAUCE:

Place egg yolks and sugar in double boiler. (You also can use a bowl over a large pot of boiling water.) Use a wire whisk and whip the mixture until it's foamy. Then, add the Marsala and continue to cook the mixture until it has doubled in volume. Use an instant-read thermometer to ensure the mixture has reached 140 degrees. Add the cream and beat the mixture for an additional minute or two.

TO MAKE ALMOND TUILE CUP: Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Toast the almonds on a baking sheet in a preheated oven until golden brown, about 8 minutes, and then remove from the oven and cool. Don't turn off the oven.

Combine the sugar, flour, egg white, butter, salt and almond extract in a stainless steel bowl. Stir the mixture until smooth. Gently fold in the almonds until coated with the batter. Hold the batter at room temperature for 20 minutes before using, stirring occasionally (this dissolves the sugar). If this step is bypassed, the cookies will not have the desired taste and texture.

Spread batter into two 6-inch circles onto a piece of parchment paper. Bake for 7 to 9 minutes. Cool cookies for 30 seconds. Working quickly, place one cookie at a time onto an inverted cup. This makes the bowl to put the berries in. Let cool. After it has cooled, remove cookie from cup, and place it right side up. You now have a bowl for your berries.

When you are ready to serve, place almond cookie on a plate and add a mound of mixed berries. Top with zabaglione sauce, a whole strawberry and garnish with a sprig of fresh mint.