

CAMPAGNA

AT THE BEDFORD POST INN

MONDAY - FRIDAY: 5:30PM - 9:30PM

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REVIEW: AT CAMPAGNA, GLAMOUR AND GRACE NOTES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

By Emily DeNitto



Lisa Wiltse for The New York Times

On a recent visit to Campagna I looked over and saw Richard Gere, the owner of the Bedford Post Inn complex in which the restaurant is located, happily dining with two others a couple of tables down. No one was bothering him: A man and woman nearby had eyes only for each other, a group of six friends were laughing over appetizers and others were moving between tables to say hello to neighbors they had just noticed. But as Mr. Gere made his way out, a quiet buzz stirred through the room.

Housed in an 18th-century farmhouse, Campagna walks a line between flashy and low key, excitement and subtlety, in all aspects. It is an elegant space, but as the name (“countryside” in Italian) suggests, it has an unpretentious air, with bare wood tables and minimal décor. We were encouraged to take home leftovers, and were then given a tag to retrieve them from the host station so we wouldn’t have to balance them on our table. A recent parting gift was a bag of popcorn, but it was an addictive rosemary caramel version that dramatically elevated the pedestrian snack.



Lobster with sunchokes, hen-of-the-wood mushrooms and gnocchi.

Credit Lisa Wiltse for The New York Times

Opened just over a year ago by the chef Michael White of the Altamarea Group (which owns restaurants in Hong Kong, Istanbul and London, as well as the New York hot spots Marea, Ai Fiori and Nicoletta), Campagna has a modern Italian menu that doesn't hew slavishly to its theme. Chunks of manchego joined marinated olives for a tasty starter. There is a truffle-crusted filet of beef — the crust a terrific contrast to the tender meat — on potato purée with roasted winter vegetables. And the exceptional dessert menu includes a baked apple crisp and a pear and almond tart, along with bomboloni, affogato and panna cotta.

The kitchen is especially adept at soups. A recent butternut squash variety was smooth and creamy — made with whipped lardo — but not too thick, its subtle flavor balanced with pickled squash, pine nuts and rosemary. Another evening, a mushroom soup thickened with truffled ricotta and melted leeks and accented with crunchy croutons was so good my companion and I clashed spoons trying to get to the last drops.

But some of the best items are classic Italian dishes newly interpreted. The rotolo was as beautiful as it was delicious, a wide piece of pasta rolled tightly on its side with a Bolognese bianco sauce and kale tucked in, a dollop of roasted garlic ricotta nestled against it. The chicken cacciatore was as far from the ubiquitous drowned-in-tomato-sauce version as one could get: Crispy pieces of roast chicken sat near creamy polenta with thick pomodoro sauce, olives and roasted cremini mushrooms in the center, and thin slices of ricotta salata were sparingly draped here and there to add a creamy note.

The kitchen's day-to-day work is handled by Devin Bozkaya, the chef de cuisine, and he has a deft touch. An entree of duck breast had a layer of perfectly crispy fat along the top, while the meat below remained pink and tender. An octopus appetizer had a lovely char, and the meat in both the lobster salad and lobster entree was just right: firm but yielding.

There were some misses. A side of winter greens was watery, without a trace of the promised Calabrian chile or Parmesan. Fusilli with pork ragu was so salty we couldn't finish it, and had such a small spoonful of accompanying ricotta that it barely lasted beyond the first bite. One night the slices of crusty Italian peasant bread served to each table were so small they felt like a tease.

Still, this is a place with a distinct signature. The staff is especially attentive without being overbearing or stiff, and they help give Campagna its sense of easy grace. One night we saw some intriguing little puff pastries topped with dark chocolate pass our table, and we asked the waiter if they were available, since they weren't on the dessert menu. "Those are being made specially for someone, but I can get you a few — don't worry," he answered, and then did, adding a wonderful finishing touch to a satisfying meal. Thank you, Mr. Gere.



A truffle-crusted filet of beef with potato purée, roasted winter vegetables and porcini sugo.

Credit Lisa Wiltse for The New York Times