



La Cucina Italian Eatery serves this porcini truffle ravioli with mushrooms.  
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

## Carb load

### La Cucina Italian Eatery has a bistro vibe

combined with fine dining service. I imagine it would be perfect for a business lunch, with salads, sandwiches, pizza and pasta. But it's also a very welcoming environment for a family dinner, including a kids' menu.

While deciding on entrees, we were served a couple of loaves of warm, herbed bread, with a mix of olive oil and balsamic vinegar for dipping. I followed this with a shared bottle of chianti (\$24), a cup of portabella mushroom cream soup (\$4), and a few orders of sautéed provolone (\$9, three pieces each). The flavor of the completely puréed soup was good, but I was disappointed with its lack of discernible 'shrooms. Our appetizer featured large, thick slices of cheese—fried crispy in butter, garlic and white wine—topped with a sauté of sun-dried tomato and pine nuts. It was an excellent pairing with the light, fruity vino.

A plate of porcini and truffle ravioli (\$16) included a mushroom demi-glace cream sauce and the mushroom chunks I'd hoped to find in the soup. There was just a hint of truffle, which amplified the porcini with great effect. As a dedicated fungi fan, I had to restrain the desire to sample more of my daughter-in-law's meal than necessary.

My daughter ordered off-menu with a nest of angel hair alfredo (\$15), while her boyfriend tried his first-ever bowl of spaghetti à la bolognese with meatballs (\$15.50). The butter, cream and Parmesan alfredo sauce was very smooth, holding onto the capellini noodles better than expected. A good meat ragu is one of my favorite things, with a well seasoned, tender meatball a close second. Though the pasta was a bit beyond al dente, it was a pretty good example for one's first experience with this classic Italian dish.

My son and I ordered from the menu of house specialties, each served with angel hair in marinara and perfectly cooked, fresh green beans. The marinara was a little under seasoned, but we agreed that the veg side almost upstaged the entrees. His Parmesan crusted calamari steaks (\$20) were tender, but the crunchy cheese crust was a little overwhelming, even to my cheese-loving self. It was tempered a bit with a squeeze of lemon, but it will be a while before we'll want Parmesan again.

There are plenty of delicacies on the menu to choose from, yet I ended up ordering the same thing as on my previous Italian food review. I guess there's just something about veal piccata (\$23) that catches my eye, and this combination of veal medallions sautéed with butter, lemon and capers was pretty spot-on. It was tender to the fork, with the salty-sour bite that lures me in.

My baby grandson enjoyed everything, particularly the fried cheese appetizer and meatballs. The growling, near-feral noises he makes while masticating make me smile. His older brother enjoyed Papa's Sketty (\$6), a kid's portion of spaghetti with marinara and one meatball. But he was more entranced with our shared dessert of tiramisu (\$6.50), ladyfinger cookies dipped in espresso and brandy, layered with a mascarpone mousse, topped with cocoa powder and shavings of dark chocolate. I had to fend him off to get a sample of the chocolate, and we hadn't thought about the brandy issue until he'd already enjoyed more than one bite. Oops. His dad reported, "It's likely unrelated, but the boy slept like a rock." It was probably just the carb load. Probably. □

### La Cucina Italian Eatery

3600 Lakeside Drive, 826-3939

La Cucina Italian Eatery is open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Learn more at [lacucinareno.com](http://lacucinareno.com).