



## LA PERLA Venus and Vino

Bryan Davis | photography Daniel Troconis

Venus may be the goddess of sexual love, but at La Perla in Georgetown, she is a mute witness to another kind of passion. On a bed of pasta, anything can happen.

There's an Italian saying "L'appetito vien mangiando," which means "appetite increases when you eat." It may sound like a contradiction, but it suggests that the more you eat, the more you crave.

At La Perla, just over the bridge from the Four Seasons Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, they know a thing or two about *craving* Italian. Although the name is better known in the States as an Italian brand of women's intimate apparel, La Perla (the Pearl) of Georgetown is the new Venetian-inspired ristorante from Executive Chef Vittorio Testa, famed locally for his previous endeavor, IL Borgo, in McLean, Virginia.

Testa's new crowning glory caps his career where it began—at hotel La Perla on Ischia Island, Italy, where he was born in 1944. The hotel La Perla was Testa's first step in a long culinary journey that has spanned the globe—taking him from the finest hotels in Rome, Naples and Venice to the Caribbean and beyond via the *Italian Line* of cruise ships, eventually dropping anchor permanently in our nation's capital.

Over twenty-years in the Washington area, Testa has made La Perla in Georgetown a culmination of his collective experiences and travels, the later of which is evident upon arrival.

La Perla is adorned with an eclectic array of Old World collectibles, antiques and art pieces that Testa has acquired over the years.

"Venus on the Half Shell," painted on tile, is the centerpiece of the dining room, symbolizing La Perla's identity. Venetian blue accents are everywhere, along with memorabilia of Testa's prior ventures.

Snap shots of distinguished guests and visiting celebrities hang in honor at the entrance and bar. The individuals pictured are as diverse and encompassing as La Perla's menu: George Bush Sr., Colin Powell, Kurt Russell, Goldie Hawn, Charlton Heston, Frank Sinatra, Dustin Hoffman, Chuck Norris and Anthony Quinn, among others.

Quinn in particular is held in especially high regard, with a large autographed portrait in the private dining room and a priceless oil painting by Quinn of himself as "Zorba the Greek" in the main room. According to staff members, the two were good friends.

La Perla's menu offers many classic Italian dishes with a few specialty items, complimented by an extensive wine list and a varied assortment of fresh pastries and cakes. DC ONE sampled four dishes from the Lunch menu: Ravioli Di Casa (\$12.50), Gamberi E Vitello Amalfitano (\$14.50), Pollo Pamigiana (\$11.50), and Lasagna Imbottita (\$12). As well as the featured dessert, affectionately named the "Kiss of Naples" (\$5.25).

The menu describes the ravioli as being served "with a light champagne sauce," which would imply mild. To the contrary, this dish has



an unexpected—yet pleasing—spicy kick. Other than the misleading description, which may catch some diners off guard, this bold dish embodied exceptional flavor. The fresh-made pasta shell and fluffy ricotta cheese within were delicate in texture yet substantive. All together, not your average garden-variety ravioli. Highly recommended.

Moving on enthusiastically to the Gamberi E Vitello Amalfitana—Jumbo sized shrimp and Veal scaloppini sautéed with Pinot Grigio wine and dry vermouth, with sage, rosemary, and fresh ginger—DC ONE discovered another stunner. Pasta is one thing, veal is another. Demonstrating the skills of a veteran, Testa proves to be formidable with both. Tender veal in a delicious savory sauce with a jumbo shrimp on top—absolute heaven. Although, more than one shrimp would go over twice as nice.

The Pollo Parmigiana was enormous. Chicken breast baked to perfection with a thick tomato sauce and stringy mozzarella cheese, moist and delicious. Uncompromisingly simple and satisfying, even for those with an increasing appetite.

Not equaling the splendor of the first three dishes, the Lasagna imbottita was a mixed bag. Served in its own casserole, the lasagna was steeped in a cream and tomato sauce mixture, which to be honest was a touch salty. On the other hand, the pasta, consistent with all the

dishes featured here, was fresh and thinly layered, making for a lighter version of this usually heavy dish—a welcome change from the “brick-style” lasagna often served at other Italian venues. A little less seasoning and a richer tomato sauce may have provided a better outcome.

Unfortunately ending on a down note, the “Kiss of Naples,” a chocolate cup filled with vanilla ice cream topped with zabaglione and chocolate sauce, could have been softer and sweeter. This criticism comes largely from the fact that the dessert was served frozen solid. A 15 to 20 minute defrost time could have made a world of difference. Even so, the thin chocolate sauce lacked any discernable flavor, coming off a bit like cold cocoa. At \$7.50 (dinner price?), you may save the kiss and opt for a less romantic but far more sensual dessert from La Perla’s pastry and cake display. A fruit covered custard or chocolate mousse cake is the perfect end, accompanied by a hot Cappuccino or Espresso. Alternately, La Perla’s stellar wine list has many selections to choose from.

Giving Donatello’s, another Italian favorite just across the street, a run for its money, La Perla offers some great amenities. Located at 2600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Lunch entrees range from \$11 to \$15, dinner entrees, \$17 to \$37. Lunch 11am-3:30pm, dinner 3:30pm-11:30pm, Mon-Fri. Lunch and dinner, 1pm-11:30pm, Sat-Sun. Reservations recommended. Call 202.333.1767 or visit [www.laperlaofwashington.com](http://www.laperlaofwashington.com).

