

Sale e Pepe

Simply Spectacular



They say that before you eat a meal you taste it with your eyes. Well, when I had the pleasure of dining at one of Marco's finest restaurants, Sale e Pepe, recently I realized that not only is this true, but it can be taken even further... the decor and ambience of a restaurant can also have an affect upon your enjoyment of a meal before you even sit down at your table. At Sale e Pepe this is entirely a good thing.

The restaurant is located on the Gulf side of the Marco Beach Ocean Resort on Collier Blvd. The building was constructed in 2002, but the cobblestone rear courtyard, where you leave your car for valet parking, with its tinkling fountains, stone statues and arched stone walkway, gives you the feeling you could be entering an ancient Tuscan villa rather than a modern building.

A stone staircase leads you into a sumptuous, dramatically lit bar area which, with its long gleaming bar, backed by a huge Toulouse Lautrec style mural, could fit well in a New York gentleman's club. The main restaurant, with its intricately carved, buttery stone walls, mosaic marble floors and tables dressed with starched white tablecloths, sparkling stemware and adorned with single red roses, can only be described as simply elegant. It is incredibly beautiful. Divided into several separate dining areas, each room offers stunning views of Marco's picture-perfect white sand beach. They can only be surpassed by the vista from the expansive terrace, where you can enjoy cooling sea breezes while watching the sun sink into the deep blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico. An impossibly romantic scene which is especially inviting with a two for one happy hour offered daily between 4:30 - 6pm!

With such an amazing setting, expectations for the food are set very high and, if our meal is anything to judge by, those expectations are easily reached and even surpassed by the young Executive Chef, Alberto Varetto. He was born in Italy and began his culinary apprenticeship

at the age of 12. He achieves a truly authentic Italian style by importing all the fundamental ingredients from Italy and making all his pastas, sauces and bread fresh daily.

When we dined there, my appetizer of roasted sea scallops, served with sweet onion confit and lobster sauce, was tender and succulent and my husband's beef tenderloin carpaccio, served with baby arugula, lemon vinaigrette and shaved parmesan cheese, was "just delicious".

Incredibly tasty but very light, the antipasti left our mouths watering for what was to come - in my case a delightful marinated farm raised chicken breast on Porcini mushrooms, sautéed with braised onions and served with Marsala wine sauce. My husband ordered a seared filet of yellow fin tuna, served with sweet onions and whole grain mustard sauce, and pronounced it "perfectly cooked".

The portions were just right and the presentation was, like the decor, simply elegant. My swirl of mashed potatoes, for example, was topped by a sprig of fresh rosemary which was impaled on a single clove of peeled garlic and their flavors gently permeated throughout the whole dish. (An easily executed idea I'm certainly going to make my own!)

The service was also impeccable - responsive, unobtrusive and friendly. My husband took our delightful waitress's recommendation to try the chocolate chip gelato topped with cocoa powder and hazelnut for dessert. He said it was "delectable" and the tart flavor of the wild cherry sorbet which accompanied my torta di limone cut the sweetness of the meringue-topped tart perfectly. Together with a rich and flavorful cup of coffee, it rounded off a memorable meal.

Before we even sat down at our table we knew there was something quite exceptional in store but, before we tried the food, we didn't appreciate that it would be quite simply spectacular.



Sale e Pepe is located at the Marco Beach Ocean Resort.
480 S. Collier Blvd., Marco Island. Attire is Resort Casual.
Visit sale-e-pepe.com or call (239) 393-1600 for reservations.