

# Sidetrack

Your Guide  
to a  
Better Day



Dining room at Sorellina, formerly the site of Salamander, has a new look thanks to designer Celeste Cooper.

## Rich tastes and a revitalized space

BY ALISON ARNETT | GLOBE STAFF

For a perfect example of the shifting landscape of local restaurants, just walk into Sorellina, the new “in” place in Back Bay. “Who are all these people out on a Monday night?” marvels one of my companions, as we glance around us at tables crowded with well-dressed men and women blithely chatting as they carve \$35 veal Milanese and \$40 steaks while downing oversized martinis.

Sorellina — owned by a team led by chef Jamie Mammano of Mistral and Teatro — is as luxe, beautiful, and smoothly operated as you might imagine the obviously well-heeled crowd demands. The Italian classic cuisine created by the very talented chef, John Delpha, is luxe, too, full of voluptuously rich tastes and textures. With its fairly pricey wine list and careful, pleasant service, Sorellina is high-end dining without the formality of fancy-occasion restaurants.

This space occupied by Sorellina is famous — or infamous, depending on how you look at it. When the condo complex Trinity Place was built in 2000, Salamander, Stan Frankenthaler’s edgy, experimental fusion restaurant, was installed at great expense on the bottom floor. With its satay bar in the back, high-decibel noise, and long-winded explanations of philosophy on the menus, Salamander was definitely a creature of an era when dining out could be an adventure on several levels — think Lydia Shire’s Biba, also long gone. After Salamander closed in bankruptcy in the summer of 2002, the space stayed vacant for years, and was regarded by some as a white elephant.

But it turns out the space was just a Cinderella waiting for a Prince Charming. Designer Celeste Co-

# TASTE

per, who also did Mistral, has a hand in this, her signature white streaked with umber browns, from the cork flooring to stylish charger plates to the tiny vases of twigs on the tables. The front bar area is a little cramped, but the open dining facilitates seeing and being seen, yet has enough texture and padding that noise remains at a comfortable level.

Sorellina isn't out to shock or even surprise you with its food. One evening we start with yellowtail crudo, the Italian version of sashimi, its clean flesh made slightly astringent by orange and lemon and by tiny jolts of crushed cherry peppers. Green beans, dressed up with a sprightly vinaigrette, are offset by the sweet crunch of sunchokes and the lemony notes of artichokes. Tripe might seem down-market here, but it's prettily presented in a black cast-iron casserole, smothered in a tomato ragu and heavily crumbed. The dish almost has the taste and texture of tofu.

Another black iron dish displays fonduta dotted with rounds of cotecchino sausage. Dunking crusty bread into the gooey cheese delights companions, but I find it a little greasy. And a salad described as market greens should perhaps wait for spring when there's something more verdant than pale celery root masked with creamy gorgonzola sauce and topped with bacon slices, making it rich and rather heavy.

This is an Italian restaurant with very little pasta, a trend that may have started in the low-carb days but now usually signals that the restaurant is expensive. Delphi neatly connects pasta to luxury by fashioning American Kobe beef into big meatballs and serving them with long, thin tubes of macaroni in a rich wine sauce. This is a pasta for royalty, heart-stopping and delicious. It also overwhelms another pasta dish of little pasta pillows stuffed with a



EVAN RICHMAN/GLOBE STAFF

The mocha-meringue chocolate semifreddo is an irresistible dessert.

mildly seasoned Bolognese and sauced with brown butter and sage.

Veal Milanese arrives; it covers the large plate with its golden, crumbed surface, and is flanked by a small pile of shaved endive. The veal is perfectly moist under its crumbs and gets a lift from the sharpness of a sherry vinaigrette. A big Niman Ranch pork chop shows off delicate pork flavor and moistness, accented by the sweet-sour flavors of a fruit mostarda and mellowed by a little casserole of pork-flecked white beans. Hunter-style chicken, full of savory flavors and not overly tomatoey, is another good dish. And the steak is fine, if rather what you might expect.

Despite a slightly steakhouse feel to the menu — and it's worth it to try the great broccoli rabe and good truffled fries as sides — fish dishes turn out to be the star entrees at Sorellina. A special of what the waiter calls a pup swordfish makes me remember what swordfish can be; it's delicate and moist, with a wonderful braised celery topping. A whole yellowtail snapper roasted at a very high tempera-

ture has a lovely crackly skin protecting its delicate flesh. It takes a little negotiating around the bones to eat a fish this way, but the reward is a clean, natural taste.

Desserts follow the same decadent path as most of the main courses. Shane Grey, who is also the pastry chef for the other Mammamo restaurants, puts out an excellent tiramisu, strong with limoncello and lightened with whipped cream and pretty rounds of dried kumquats. His cherry-chocolate torta with a chocolate zabaglione is dense, sweet, and delicious. The prize, though, is the mocha-meringue semifreddo, like an unwhipped mousse lightened with meringue, as irresistible as a highly flavored cloud.

As a recent visit to the restaurant wound down, I pondered Sorellina. The food is almost uniformly wonderful, and for that and the excellent service, the very high prices don't seem out of line. If this was my regular dining spot, I might miss the sense of daring that other chefs and other restaurants can impart in their food. Yet, for a fine meal and a coddled experience, Sorellina is a sure bet.

## SORELLINA ★★★½

1 Huntington, Boston. 617-412-4600. All major credit cards.  
Fully accessible.

**PRICES** First courses \$11-\$18. Pasta \$13-\$26. Second courses \$26-\$40. Desserts \$9-\$12.

**HOURS** Sun 5:30- 10 p.m., Mon-Thurs 5:30-10:30 p.m.,  
Fri-Sat 5:30-11 p.m. Reservations accepted.

**NOISE LEVEL** Plenty of padding and soundproofing means conversation is fairly easy.

### MAY WE SUGGEST

**Appetizer** Yellowtail crudo (raw) with crushed cherry peppers and citrus

**Entrees** Pork chop with Tuscan beans and dried-fruit mostarda.

**Dessert** Mocha-meringue chocolate semifreddo.

★★★★ Extraordinary | ★★★ Excellent | ★★ Very Good | ★ Good | Fair

Ratings reflect the restaurant critic's judgment of the food, service, and atmosphere in relation to the price, based on several anonymous visits.