

DiningOut

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Find excellent food in an elegant atmosphere at Amici's

Theresa J. Marquez

Poughkeepsie Journal

For many, a drive to Dooley Square in Poughkeepsie means hopping the train at Metro-North to points south. Amici's offers a different reason to head there — a great meal.

Signage on the front door reads "Goomba Bar," so we weren't certain what we were in for. Just past this to the left were stairs that lead down to the lounge, and to the right of this was a pizza bar. (I hear a pizza can be had here for \$5 Wednesday nights.) At this point, we expected a very casual dining room for dinner, but were surprised to walk into a large, spacious room. Softly colored walls were broken up with large windows that were softened and warmed with dark elegant drapes. Décor was refined and polished, and there was a killer view of the Mid-Hudson Bridge.

We were seated and instantly presented with menus, and shortly thereafter, a basket of assorted breads. Instead of butter, a plate of olive oil was served. We knew we were destined for a stellar meal when we realized the oil was not flavored with the requisite sprinkle of herbs or vinegar. Instead, it was colored and flavored with a fine puree of tomatoes and garlic.

For our first course we started with the Steam Pot (\$14), which was a mixture of seafood: clams, mussels and shrimp. It was kicked up in flavor with the addition of andouille sausage, served in a robust ale and garlic broth. We enjoyed every drop.

Also for an appetizer, we had to try the Fried Gorgonzola Stuffed Olives (\$8). I am so glad we didn't ignore these when perusing the menu. This was a great dish. Beautifully plated in a martini glass were hot golden orbs.

Large, salty green olives, stuffed with tangy cheese, had been battered and fried. The combination was sheer ambrosia. It was paired with a vermouth aioli that need not have made an appearance, as it added nothing to the dish.

"Cavatelli" Notarnicola (\$16) was a belly- and body-warming dish of perfectly cooked cavatelli pasta tossed with ground sausage and broccoli rabe. Attention to this dish was upped with proper handling of the rabe. Everything was suitably seasoned with crushed red pepper flakes and garlic, and then sprinkled with a prudent shave of Parmesan.

The Veal Bolognese (\$16) was a different take on the classic dish. Chunks of tender braised veal were combined with aromatics and red sauce, studded with green peas and carrots. The robust, chunky sauce was then tossed with pappardelle ribbons that were so tender we were compelled to inquire if they were house-made. Neither the pappardelle nor the cavatelli was made on the premises. They were both simply, properly prepared.

Amici's offers a respectable handful of house wines by the glass, but the wine menu is thoughtful and quite affordable. The Malbec, La Puerta, Famatina Valley (\$22) worked with all of the evening's dishes. The various components of our meal brought out different nuances to the wine that made it very enjoyable and one to add to our list of favorites.

Dessert initially felt like an afterthought here, but the last impression of an establishment is frequently the most remembered. Coppa Spagnola (\$8) and a Chocolate Martini (\$10) wrapped up our evening. The Coppa was a swirl of vanilla and amarena cherry gelato topped with whole amarena cherries. While not house-made, it was

Amici's

★★★★ (Very good)

35 Main St. (at Dooley Square), Poughkeepsie; 845-452-4700; www.amicis-restaurant.com; Italian cuisine. Hours: Sunday, noon to 9 p.m.; Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Reservations recommended for larger parties; Visa and MasterCard accepted; catering available; handicapped accessible.

Price range: Lunch, \$5.50-\$18; dinner, \$14-\$29; children's menu available.

Directions: In Poughkeepsie, from the Mid-Hudson Bridge driving north, take the Main Street exit. At the end of the off ramp, turn left. Amici's is on the right side of the road in Dooley Square — in the same parking lot as Metro-North.

Ratings breakdown

Food ★★★★★

Ambience ★★★★★

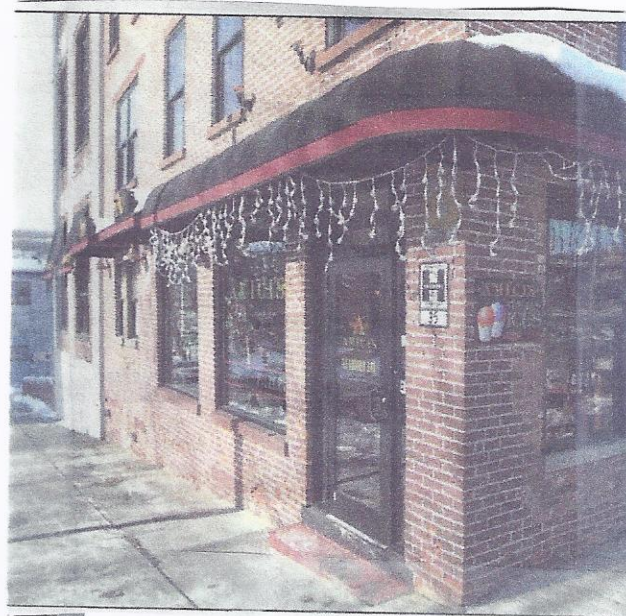
Service ★★★★★

Value ★★★★★

refreshing and reminiscent of Italy, as was the Chocolate Martini we also shared.

Our server for the evening was charming and more than efficient. He truly seemed to enjoy what he was doing. He made us feel welcome without being smothered and was attentive to our table while still doing the same for others in the room.

The Poughkeepsie Journal pays for the meals that are the subjects of restaurant reviews and reviewers do not identify themselves prior to the end of the meal. Theresa J. Marquez, Web producer for the Poughkeepsie Journal, graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in 2005 with high honors. She has worked for Cooking Light magazine and is a local personal chef.



Restaurant Ratings

- ★ poor
- ★★ fair
- ★★★ good
- ★★★★ very good
- ★★★★★ excellent

AMICI'S 35 Main St., Poughkeepsie • 875-452-4700