

Monday December 15, 2008

New Jersey

MONTHLY

Find Your Perfect Place...

www.remax-nj.com

[HOME](#) [RESTAURANTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [JERSEY SHORE](#) [ATLANTIC CITY](#) [TOWNS & SCHOOLS](#) [TOP DO](#)

RESTAURANT REVIEW

[A](#) | [A](#) | [A](#) [Share](#) | [Pr](#)

Dalto

Reviewed by [Eric Levin](#)

Posted December 3, 2008

 [click images to enlarge](#)



Courtesy of daltoristorante.com.

Dalto regulars often know what they're going to eat before they walk in the door. Part of that comes with knowing the small menu (though there are always tempting specials). But many put in requests when they make their reservations (a must on Friday and Saturday).

"They say, 'Mauro, can you make me osso buco, or tripe, or rabbit, or polenta with sausage, or pears in red wine with cinnamon?'" says chef and owner Mauro D'Alto. If possible he buys enough to offer it to all as a special. "I make twelve osso buco for two nights, sometimes they finish in one night," he says. "What can I do?"

It's a good problem to have. Since Dalto opened two years ago next month, word of mouth has overcome seeming disadvantages—lack of advertising, only 38 seats, humdrum location across from a Home Depot, and modest if homey interior. One reason is the warm welcome for regulars and first-timers alike. D'Alto's wife, Anna, a Union City High School math teacher, does the honors Fridays and Saturdays. D'Alto himself emerges from the kitchen to greet people several times a night.

Of course, good vibes only go so far. D'Alto's cooking does the rest. His stracciatella with spinach, the classic Roman egg drop soup, was richly flavorful and satisfying. Equally pleasing was tender veal scaloppini sautéed in white wine, butter, and lemon. Pastas are a strong point.

Half orders are a good idea—the portion is generous. We loved the sumptuous fettuccine alla Romana—expertly house-made noodles with mushrooms, prosciutto, and peas in cream sauce—as well as fedelini Mauro, thin spaghetti with a sauce that teases gorgeous flavor from shrimps, artichokes, cherry tomatoes, olive oil, and garlic.

D'Alto grew up in Molfetta, outside Bari, on Italy's southern Adriatic coast. All you need do is taste his bracing seafood salad, with its exceptionally tender slices of octopus and perfectly cooked scallops and shrimp, to see that he brought his region's piscatorial know-how with him.

But it was love, not just work, that brought D'Alto to New Jersey. In 1977, the cargo ship on which he was chef docked in Philadelphia, and he went to visit family in Union City. There he met Anna, a Union City native whose parents are from Molfetta. They wed in 1978. Over the years he developed a following at several Italian restaurants in New York.

"But after 9/11, I said, 'Come, try Jersey,'" says Anna. "He was tired of the commute. He worked in Totowa for awhile, then in Ridgewood. People kept nagging, 'When are you going to open your own place?'" At length,

they found an affordable spot in Clifton. “I knew my husband’s cooking was good, but I’m still amazed at what’s going on here.”

On our two Saturday visits, it seemed that at least one person at every table spoke Italian. The most expensive dish on the menu is \$25 for first-rate filet mignon medallions sautéed with jumbo shrimp, shallots, and shiitake mushrooms in a brandy cream sauce. There were few disappointments—a romaine and mango salad special suggested two characters in search of an author. A mushroom risotto was al dente but surprisingly bland.

D’Alto says the kitchen is too small to do much with dessert, so apart from making his oft-requested pears, he orders tiramisù, cheesecake, cannoli, and sorbets from Bindi or De Robertis in Manhattan. When the restaurant opened, Anna and the children prevailed on D’Alto to put veal and chicken parmigiana and meatballs on the menu. “I don’t want to make it because it’s not classic Italian cuisine,” he says. “But the people, they want it, and whatever the people want, I want to make it for them.”

As a result, customers shower him with thanks and compliments, and sometimes more. “Everybody like you, they kiss you,” D’Alto says. “What can I do?”

[HOME](#) [RESTAURANTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [JERSEY SHORE](#) [ATLANTIC CITY](#) [TOWNS & SCHOOLS](#) [TOP DOCTO](#)
[ADVERTISE](#) [CONTACT US](#) [CHANGE OF ADDRESS](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#) [GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS](#)

New Jersey
MONTHLY

Copyright © 2007 New Jersey Magazine | Legal Dis
Please visit our other sites: [ParkPlaceMagazine.co](#)