

The Post and Courier

For good pasta and value, the table is set at 'Sette'

By Deidre Schipani
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Mic Smith
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Sette

Possibly, you have heard of Rich Melman.

He is an innovative restaurant creator who has been described by industry consultant Ron Paul as "the Steven Spielberg of the restaurant industry."

The man is a genius who has developed a Mexican restaurant called Hat Dance; an Asian inspired restaurant called Big Bowl; a red sauce Italian spot, Tucci Benucch and his first restaurant, R.J. Grunts (1971) is still in business.

His company is called Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises and more than 70 restaurant concepts bear witness to both his talent and his sense of humor.

Local restaurateur Sal Parco has not been as prolific as Melman, but he has certainly dabbled in a variety of formats from his initial seven-seat Mustard Seed restaurant in Mount Pleasant, a diner concept in his Boulevard Diner, a bakery-cafe in the Village Bakery, expansions of the popular Mustard Seed genre into Summerville and James Island, casual grill fare at the Long Point Grill, "Mexican" on the menu at Uno Mas and now the purchase of Locklear's Lowcountry Grill space on Maybank Highway. This allows for the furthering of the Parco Enterprise. He is our own Lowcountry Pied Piper of restaurant concepts.

Sette, meaning seven in Italian, and a Lucky 7 at that, is Parco's foray into the Italian culinary idiom. Housed in a former fast-food restaurant, the space is minimally adorned. A palette of warm red tones on the walls, hanging glass globes of Murano-inspired lighting, local art work depicting the coastal location, a few cushions strewn along the banquette and two high-top communal tables translate into the convivial vibe that Sette generates.

The mood is familial. The barriers to sound reduction are few and far between. The hybrid spirit of the place is felt upon entry, and loyalty is seen in the number of regulars who know the wait staff and the kitchen staff and spend hardly any time looking at the menu.

The appetizers make for perfect companions to the half-priced bottle nights that take place during the week. The Calamari (\$8) are crisp and served with lemon and thyme aioli; Mussels (\$9) can be had treated with a caper, parsley and garlic bath.

The Olive Plate (\$5) rears from pedestrian options and complements the Trio of Dips (\$7) and the Goat Cheese and Tomato Fondue (\$6), with equal measure. The real keeper is the Portobello Piccata (\$7), a pan-fried cap of mushroom, treated Piccata fashion with a crisp bread crumb crust. It's served with lemon and capers and a dusting of Parmesan cheese. Vegetarian nirvana.

Salads are substantial, as in entree style. Try the Blackened Salmon (\$12) or Steak Salads (\$12). Classic as in Caesar (\$7), Caprese (\$7) or Antipasto (\$9) also are served. Kudos to the kitchen for its mastery of the vinaigrette proportion equation. It's a taut balance of vinegar and olive oil, deftly seasoned.

We shared a Pine Nut Crusted Goat Cheese Salad (\$8) with pomegranate vinaigrette and were not disappointed. And the kitchen portioned the shared order without even being asked.

Pastas range from the simple alliance of Olive Oil Linguini (\$10) with garlic and herbs, or Meatballs and Linguini (\$11) in a tomato basil sauce, to complex affairs of Blue Crab and Apple Cannelloni (\$15), Braised Beef (\$14) or Lobster Ravioli (\$15).

The Shrimp Pasta (\$14) with capers, herbs, shrimp, white wine and tomato broth managed to be sturdy and light at the same time. Easily shared, its only weakness was lackluster tomatoes. Generous with shrimp, fresh herbs and garlic, its flavors harmonized in taste, texture and aroma.

The Pork Osso Buco (\$15) plated a braised and burnished pork shank on a bed of Parmesan risotto. Our only quibble was a tad too much saffron. We were pleased to see this expensive spice used as is traditional with the risotto but picked up the medicinal aftertaste that one experiences if the seasoning is heavy handed.

Chicken (\$13) and Veal (\$15) are treated to the Italian menu mainstays of Marsala, Parmigiana, Piccata and Milanese.

Our server was well-informed, enthusiastic and spirited.

The pastas are a success story at Sette. The pricing, even more so.

There is a pleasant refinement to the cooking; a generosity of portions that turns one meal into three.

Sette does not telegraph Italian sophistication, but rather its message and mission are ones of incredible value in portion to price served in an atmosphere of fun and abundance.

Sette

Neighborhood Favorite

Phone: 388-8808

Address: 201 Coleman Blvd., Mount Pleasant

Food: *** 1/2

Service: *** 1/2

Atmosphere: ** 1/2

Price: \$-\$\$

Costs: Appetizers \$5-9; salads \$5-\$12; pastas \$10-\$15; entrees \$13-\$15; lunch \$5-\$9.

Vegetarian Options: Yes.

Bar: Beer and wine; half-price wines Mon.-Thurs. from 5-8 p.m.; lunch punch card, purchase six and seventh is free.

Hours: Mon.-Fri. 11:30-2:30 p.m., lunch; Mon.-Thurs. 5-9:30 p.m., dinner; Fri.-Sat. 5-10 p.m., dinner; closed Sun.

Decibel Level: Boisterous.

Wheelchair Access: Yes.

Parking: Yes.

Other: e-mail at creativemeasures@bellsouth.net; daily special sheet featuring local and seasonal items.

Restaurant facts: Rating criteria include quality and presentation of food, service and ambiance, while taking into consideration the type of restaurant — elegant, night out or neighborhood favorite.

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