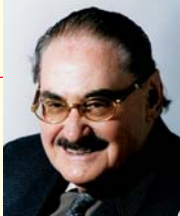




RATED ★★★



Osteria Del Circo

Those who love Italy and the best in Italian fare will feel at home seated at one of the white clothed, candlelit tables, assembled cheek to jowl, a top-of-the-line bottle of Chianti at hand.

Food is of maximum significance at Osteria Del Circo—Tuscan Italian food that demands vigilant prepping and the lightest of touches. Modern assets of the restaurant impresario such as showmanship and a way with celebrities are not lost on the young owners—new-generation Maccioni's, son's Marco, Mario and Mauro, as well as Siro's (Le Cirque) spouse Egidiana, all of whom have enormous regard for the palates of their guests.

There are dazzling circus decorations—a flamboyant big-top payoff accenting colorful, upbeat works of art and sculptures. Everything, in other words, to take a person's mind off the stresses of the day, and place it on enjoying the kitchens smoking heap of spaghetti frutta di mare, refreshing mound of tuna tartare garnished with shavings of fennel, or a daily special like the succulent platter of iced, plump, briny blue point oysters embellished with a dollop of sparkling caviar and creme fraiche. Waiters are watchful but never hovering, in fact, everything moves and meshes with smooth, serene efficiency.

This may not be the town's greatest Italian restaurant, as some maintain, but it is comfortably up with the first fistful. Those who love Italy and the best in Italian fare will feel at home seated at one of the white clothed, candlelit tables, assembled cheek to jowl, a top-of-the-line bottle of Chianti at hand, the subtle perfume of garlic bubbling with that of bubbling butter as the server brings forth some delicate dishes from the humming open kitchen.

Chef Carlo is well acquainted with the countless ways to cook veal. One of these, and perhaps the simplest of all is veal cutlet Milanese, just an ordinary pounded and breaded veal chop, but a dish which knowing gastronomes often single out to test the ability of the Italian cook. Circo's chef deserves full marks. As proven on frequent visits, his finished product is not an ordinary example of this dish. The meat is flattened out to the thinness of a fine Swiss watch, dipped in egg and crumbs and seasoning, cooked to a crisp golden brown with an excellent argula tomato salad on the side.

Circo is equally proud of its lamb chops, grilled on a fast fire, comprised of six buxom, tender, juicy, well herbed and seasoned hunks. Fresh denizen of the deep ala griglia is contrived from a generous portion of Monkfish accompanied by artichoke,

Photos by UdoR photography



Group photo: Luca Tesconi, David Gomez, Marco Maccioni, Carlo Apolloni, Claudia Rizzeto, Bruno Dassin, Mauro Maccioni and Egidiana Maccioni

oven-dried tomatoes and asparagus, but it's slightly over-grilled and somewhat dry. Pumpkin and foie gras ravioli in a truffle butter sauce, is silky smooth and stellar, prepared with a special flourish. One more ravioli favorite is created with buffalo ricotta and spinach augmented with buttery sage. Divergent dishes of a rewarding nature also include New York's most outstanding chicken pallard, flattened and grilled to moist superiority, a chunky, hunky lobster salad with vegetable cruditee tossed in a black truffle vinaigrette, excellent octopus on a raft of crushed potatoes and a sweet standard—buffalo mozzarella paired with sliced fresh tomatoes.

At Osteria Del Circo, the meals closing comes on as strong as the beginning. The bouquet of seven seductive Italian cheeses—a spectrum from Pecorino, a firm and dense cheese to La Tur, a small mild round robiola—is difficult to ignore. Best of the sweet confections sampled are the Tuscan doughnuts with a choice of marmalade, vanilla or chocolate, served alongside a cappuccino cream cup, followed by Boba au Rhum. Also good is Circo's legendary frothy hot chocolate.

The wine list has steadily improved over time and now offers a broad range of selections. There are few bargains, but you can find some modestly priced bottles.

*** Osteria Del Circo, 120 West 55th Street, New York. (212) 265-3636. Serves lunch and dinner. Prix fixe dinner to 6:30 PM and after 9:30 PM \$34 per person. A la carte dinner entrees \$25 to \$36. Reservations advised. Accepts major credit cards.BT



Chef Carlo Apolloni



Dining Area



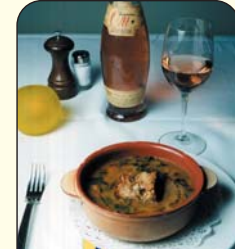
Oysters with Lemon Grass Creme Fraiche and Caviar



Bucalini Allamattriciana



Cacciucco



Zuppa Frantoiana



Baba Au Rum



Paillard of Chicken



Bombolini E Cappuccino Creme Brulee



Costoletta Di Vitello Alla Milanese