

That's Amore at Scottsdale's Sassi Restaurant

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen/Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

Love is in the air—and on the menu—at Scottsdale's romantic Sassi restaurant.



It's certainly not breaking news that Sassi restaurant in North Scottsdale is one of the Valley's most romantic dining destinations. Diners feel as if they are enjoying dinner in Southern Italy, viewing gorgeous Old World architecture—they might even catch a bride and groom snapping photos near the fountain and hear the sounds of a string quartet as they accompany the betrothed down the aisle. And with the addition of 14-year culinary veteran, Christopher Nicosia, as Sassi's new executive chef in the fall, the Italian eats are as delicious as the sunset in the distance is lovely.

Sprawling is one way to describe Sassi. The restaurant is composed of several different dining areas for guests to choose from, including five dining rooms, a bar area and alfresco spaces that offer stunning desert views and even a sneak peek at the occasional wedding ceremony. Summer nights are the perfect time to enjoy the outdoor areas and indulge in Sassi's caprese salad, one of the Valley's top versions of this ubiquitous appetizer. The sizable portion of buffalo mozzarella is surrounded by a rainbow of organic heirloom tomato slices—and a few grape tomatoes sprinkled on top. Olive oil and basil top off this incredible salad.

For an even more decadent start to your meal, try the spiedino di fontina, a hot skillet featuring prosciutto-wrapped fontina cheese, roasted red peppers and an assortment of roasted olives. The dish is a delight for the taste buds as it spotlights an array of flavors and textures: salty prosciutto, creamy fontina, sweet peppers and tangy, blackened olives.

Because Sassi is like a slice of Southern Italy, its pasta should be tops—and it is. The restaurant dishes up a variety of handmade pastas, from pappardelle to cavatelli. It is the orecchiette dish that impresses the most. The pasta plate features hearty, al dente orecchiette with sausage, red peppers, rapini and pecorino cheese—a mouthwatering arrangement of sweet and savory, creamy and crunchy. Though the risotto has all the makings of a memorable dish, including porcini mushrooms, artichokes, Parmigiano Reggiano and truffle oil, the result is a bit bland.



After trying the branzino for the main course, it'll be a challenge to visit Sassi without ordering it again and again. The grilled Mediterranean black bass is slathered in divine olive tapenade and lemon and each bite is better than the last, as the juices have had more time to tend to the flaky fish. Plus, the mild fish provides a perfect canvas for the robust olive tapenade on which to shine.

Though the black bass would be a very happy ending to dinner at Sassi, don't miss out on the ricotta fritters.

The fritters are adorably served on a rustic cutting board with a trio of dipping sauces: pistachio cream, lemon curd and chocolate. Though one usually can't go wrong with chocolate, the third sauce would have been even more delicious against the warm fritter if served warm itself. The refreshing pistachio cream is the table favorite and the summery curd is tart and tasty. From desserts to the weddings that the restaurant hosts, Sassi is in the business of happily ever afters.

To Learn More:

Sassi: 10455 E. Pinnacle Peak Parkway, Scottsdale. 480.502.9095, www.sassi.biz.

Chef: Christopher Nicosia

Hours: Sunday through Saturday, 5:30 to 10 p.m. (Bar opens at 5 p.m.)