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### Meating Place

**Tigelleria puts an innovative twist on Italian in Campbell**

**By Cheryl Sternman Rule**

THE FACT that you can get pretty much any kind of food in the South Bay is no great shocker. From \$4 bowls of ramen to \$175 fondue extravaganzas, Silicon Valley has the dining spectrum pretty well covered. Maybe that's why discovering a new restaurant with an innovative concept is such a nice surprise. At Campbell's warm, intimate Tigelleria, the food itself isn't so unusual, but the restaurant's central conceit is. And that's refreshing.

Located on a corner lot steps from downtown Campbell, the colorful restaurant opened in December with a menu centered on fine cheeses and Italian salumi, or high-end cured meats. Nothing particularly earth-shattering there. But accompanying the meat and dairy are free-flowing, piping hot flat-breads the size of minipitas. These are the tigelle, and they form the addictive heart of the meal.

Owner Elizabetta Benetollo, who was raised in the Veneto region of Northern Italy, explains that tigelle are a specialty of Emilia-Romagna, where for centuries housewives would pile rounds of dough between hot stones, cooking the breads right in the fireplace. Today, young Italians nibble tigelle with weepy Crescenza cheese when dining out, but free-standing tigellerias, which specialize in this style of eating, don't really exist anywhere—even in Italy, if we take Benetollo's word for it.

Now don't expect tigellerias to start popping up coast to coast. After all, the concept does have its limitations. First off, there's only so much sliced meat and cheese anyone can eat, no matter how tasty those cute little tigelle may be. By the time I finished my second meal at the restaurant, I was dying for a fat hunk of watermelon to cleanse my salty palate. I guess you could call it prosciutto overload. (And I'm a girl who, once weaned, went straight from the breast to the deli, so I've got nothing against sliced meat.)

But let's start at the beginning. Soups, salads and pastas are all available as first courses, and a little vegetable action is a good choice given the cholesterol onslaught to come. The vellutata (\$6), a puréed butternut squash soup sprinkled with amaretti cookies, is a light and refreshing starter. Just ask for your soup hot. (On one visit two soups arrived almost cold.) The verde salad (\$7), a mix of delicate baby greens, pears, golden raisins and walnuts, was crisp and juicy. The other salads all have cheese in them, which makes little sense. Why have cheese before you have, well, cheese?

A pasta course is also available in case you need to carbo-load for a marathon or something. The creamy, smoky carbonara (\$14) was terrific.

As for entrees, 10 meat-and-cheese combo platters are available, and trying to make heads or tails of them is no easy task. Fortunately, servers aim to please and do so admirably. On one visit I had the etrusco (\$14), with porchetta, two kinds of salami and pecorino, romano and toscano cheeses. The porchetta—and the prosciutto, speck and pancetta in another platter (the salumi palette, \$18)—are sliced wafer-thin, and the cheeses are all very high quality. An all-cheese palette (\$18) pairs six cheeses (Crescenza, Taleggio, Gorgonzola, Fontina, pecorino and Parmigiano-Reggiano) with fig, maple-pumpkin and chestnut spreads. The sweet-salty contrast works well. And, of course, hot tigelle flow throughout.

Word to the wise: entree platters are enormous. If you order two platters for two people, you'll have serious leftovers for the next day's lunch. The exception was the skimpy grilled vegetable palette (\$12). Why be so generous with imported meats and cheeses and so stingy with portobellos, eggplant and bell peppers?

The vibrant décor includes robin's-egg-blue paint, classical frescoes and a funky fuchsia chandelier. Wines from both Italy and California line the walls, and the Verona-born sommelier has taken pains to offer suggested pairings for each entree platter. You'll also find numerous wines by the glass for under \$10. Another reason to linger: Italian movies projected



Photograph by Felipe Buitrago

**JUST WHEN YOU learned how to pronounce 'GNOCCHI':** Tigelleria presents unusual offerings like this Valtellina salad.

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silently by the bar. There's something especially civilized about watching *The Bicycle Thief* while sipping prosecco.

For dessert, Benetollo makes a killer mascarpone-topped meringue cake, as well as a sweet salami, which sounds disgusting but is wonderful, chocolaty and completely salami-free. The recipe came from her grandmother, who served it at her restaurant in Italy.

Finally, Tigelleria pushes the organic button, and they push it hard. From the "organic fresh ground black pepper" to the "100 percent organic De Cecco pasta," the word organic appears, I'm not kidding, 47 times on the menu.

Now pass them meats.

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**Tigelleria**

Address: 76 E. Campbell Ave., Campbell

Phone: 408.884.3808

Hours: Lunch 11am-2pm Tue-Sun; dinner 5-10pm Tue-Thu, Sun; 5-11pm

Cuisine: Italian, specializing in flat breads, meats and cheeses

Price Range: \$10-\$18

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