

Des Moines Register

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Section: Datebook**Page:** 12DB**Where's the beef? Mezzodi's has it***Moranville W.E.**Special to Des Moines Register*

DATEBOOK DINER

W. E. Moranville

Boy, things sure have changed at Mezzodi's since I reviewed it last, more than three years ago. Gone are the more ambitious dishes, such as the Wild Mushroom Ravioli, the Boursin-Stuffed Free-Range Chicken and the Prosciutto-Wrapped Sea Bass. These days, well-known Italian-American standbys mostly crowd the menu, and evidently that's what pleases the crowds. However, I did find something to rave about; read on.

AMBIENCE: Stained-glass partitions and boldly colored, slender hanging lamps breathe color into the soothing neutral-hued rooms; it's one of the more playful and sensuous dining spaces in town, and the cushy half-moon booths can be downright romantic.

And when you think about it, it's pretty amazing that you can enjoy a \$6.95 meatball sandwich in such an uplifting atmosphere.

MENU: Italian-and American-focused selections of pasta, steaks, entrees, sandwiches and pizza; most are classic (spaghetti and meatballs, veal Parmesan), though there are some surprises (Pasta Gaby, with shrimp, tomatoes and onions in a chipotle cream sauce). Spend less than \$10 for sandwiches and some pasta selections, or up to \$19.95 for Steak de Burgo.

HERE'S THE BEEF: Beef entrees were far and away the best items we tasted in two visits. I was told the beef is purchased from a grower in Red Oak and aged in-house; two full-flavored cuts of meat came to the table -prime rib (served Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays) and a top-sirloin steak. Next time, I'll have them hold the Chipotle Red Pepper Sauce on the steak - it sounded enticing, but really wasn't all that. I'd rather have enjoyed the gorgeous cut in all its simple, beefy glory.

Another highlight was, of all things, the Spinach and Artichoke Dip; often a gloppy cheesy mass at other places, this one was a balanced version with plenty of notable chunks of artichokes.

WHAT HAPPENED? I've enjoyed the Olive Chicken in the past, and I seem to remember it being more vibrant in both flavor and color. This time, the sauteed breasts were pale rather than irresistibly golden brown, and the overall dish had a watery effect. We were disappointed in the rather soupy lasagna -where were the distinct layers so loved in this classic?

Salads are standard, though the sweet-tinged creamy garlic dressing stood out.

SERVICE: Our poised, professional server did the job with warmth and enthusiasm.

STAY FOR DESSERT?: Yes, for the airy, moist tiramisu -made by the owners' mother, no less. It's in that ever-elusive category of desserts that don't weigh the body down, but, rather, lift your spirits high.

BOTTOM LINE: Mezzodi's joins my list of places to get a great steak, especially if you're looking for some atmosphere to accompany it.

Mezzodi's

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WORTH A VISIT

What the stars mean:

* -Disappointing

** -Tolerable

*** -Worth a visit

**** -Highly recommended

***** -Exceptional

AT A GLANCE:

Food:

Notable beef entrees trumped the pasta dishes.

Service:

Poised and professional.

Ambience: Playful and sensuous.

RECOMMENDED

DISHES:

Spinach and Artichoke Dip: \$6.95

Top Sirloin: \$15.95

Prime Rib: Price varies

BAR SERVICE: Full bar.

DETAILS:

4519 Fleur Drive

Phone: 287-3333

Lunch: 11:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Dinner: 5-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 5-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Photo_By: DOUG WELLS/REGISTER PHOTOS

THE PRIME RIB IS TOP NOTCH AT MEZZODI'S.

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