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LA PENTOLA DELLA QUERCIA

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We literally cannot recall the last time we went out in Yaletown, a yuppie haven full of logo-flaunting revellers who pay dearly for overpriced drinks. But when we heard Adam Pegg and Lucais Syme, proprietors of the acclaimed La Quercia in Kitsilano, were opening a restaurant there we headed straight to the Opus Hotel where La Pentola della Quercia recently opened its doors. La Pentola apparently means little pot – suggesting it's a small taste of La Quercia, but truth be told it's a much more expansive space and avoids the overcrowding we suffered at their modestly-sized original location where it's difficult to score a reservation unless you're organized enough to call weeks in advance. The Opus Hotel seems to have historically struggled with its dining program – its original French bistro Elixir gave way to Peter Girges's pop-up concepts (100 Nights, then Cento Notti) but Pegg and Syme's concept, thankfully, seems here to stay.



We stopped in after work and perched at La Pentola's rounded bar and were pleasantly surprised to find a room that avoids any of the gimmickry of the hotel in which it is housed with simple and elegant décor and tables laid with white cloths. The dinner menu is stocked with Stuzzichini that serve as sophisticated bar snacks such as bruschetta, cold cuts like coppa, salame and prosciutto, and polpettine (bite-sized meatballs) but they serve full meals at the bar too. La Pentola's wine list offers local and Italian options with whites ranging from \$8-12 a glass, and reds slightly more from \$12-14 and we are grateful they have avoided the trappings of many local hotel bars where glasses of wine often ring in at upwards of \$15. Our glass of Valle Reale Montepulciano D'Abruzzo was quite rich and full-bodied for its \$12 price point, a reassuring sign the list has been carefully curated with an eye to value.

As any serious Italian venture should, La Pentola serves house-made pasta and that's where we dove in sampling the Polenta Gnocchi Cheese Fondue. Crafting the gnocchi from polenta gave the morsels an interesting and welcome texture and flavour. Their al dente exteriors gave way to soft centres that practically melted in the mouth and these delicious bites were perfectly complimented by the cheese



sauce which was thick and rich although somehow managed to be lighter than a standard cream sauce. If you're looking for a lighter option, we also enjoyed the pasta with clams, mussels and broccoli all tossed in tomato sauce. This dish served with "badly cut pasta" – large sections scored by hand – was in fact expertly prepared and cooked perfectly and the larger-than average pieces gave the dish a wonderfully rustic feel. We are already eyeing the Linguine alla Genovese for our next visit, a traditional favourite consisting of pesto with potatoes and green beans, a dish the doyenne of Italian cooking, Marcella Hazan gave high praise: "When all its components are right, there is no single dish more delicious in the entire Italian pasta repertory." The pastas, ranging from \$12-13 are Primi dishes and are intended as smaller portions, reflecting the traditional style of eating in Italy in which a pasta course is followed by a meat or fish dish. Still, supplemented by Contorni like the Rapini and Eggplant we savoured – both perfectly cooked and traditionally prepared – we were quite satisfied with our portions which served as mains, especially when followed by a dessert. Their rotating selection that night included a light and moist hazelnut and chocolate cake accompanied by a flavourful pear compote.



The menu at La Pentola includes many more Secondi options that are sure to quench larger appetites including Bistecca alla Fiorentina, a Florentine version of a Porterhouse steak, prepared for two with a green salad, and Trout Involtini served with Zucchini Trifolati – these surely warrant another visit. La Pentola is a welcome addition to the downtown dining scene and an excellent alternative to Pegg and Syme's original location in Kits. With their lunch spot La Ghianda recently bestowed a liquor licence and their much-anticipated L'Officio finally green-lighted and almost ready to open its doors, it seems Pegg and Syme have quite a little empire on their hands, much to the delight of Italian food enthusiasts.

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