

RIVALDA

Written by Linda Vadász

Rivalda means "footlights" in Hungarian, and the theme is carried out in the décor of the restaurant's two pleasant dining rooms, where the walls are filled with theater posters and prints of famous actors. Klieglights hang from the ceiling, setting the stage for treats that enliven the palate. Ágnes Weninger and her partner, executive chef György Gunst, have created an engaging menu, with an emphasis on international cuisine currently in vogue, featuring fresh seasonal ingredients indigenous to Hungary, with a few exceptions such as fresh fish flown in from abroad. All wines are local, since, as Ágnes points out, there are now many top-notch Hungarian vintages to choose from.

On a recent lunchtime visit I was first greeted by the trilling of a rigó, the magnificent mockingbird living in the restaurant's ivy-covered courtyard once home to the Carmelite monks. The setting is one of the most beautiful and peaceful outdoor dining spots in Budapest. In the evening, the rigó is replaced by sounds of a resident saxophonist or keyboard player.

For a mild-flavored light starter, try the hazelnut-fried mozzarella on a bed of mixed greens with apple cider vinaigrette garnished with caramelized apples. Ágnes recommended the Légli Sauvignon Blanc Reserve to accompany it. This elegant white wine with an intense bouquet of green fruit accents and delicate aromas from its six-month barrel ageing offer textured harmony.

For a more piquant option, try the perennial favorite, the grilled fennel and goat cheese with mixed greens in balsamic vinaigrette. The anise-flavored fennel is complemented by a delightful tanginess of soft cheese and the zing of balsamic vinegar.

An excellent main course is the grilled salmon with a whole-grain mustard beurre blanc and curried eggplant chutney. The parsnip-fennel purée paired with the fish had a sublime silky texture and subtle flavor. The fish was perfectly cooked: moist and flaky, while the chutney was a surprisingly satisfying accompaniment. Try the Gere-Weninger Kékfrankos-based Rosé with its fresh, spicy accents on the nose.

A heartier main course is the veal chop with gorgonzola sauce accompanied by Mediterranean lasagna. If you like your meat served pink, don't forget to request it, which I did not do. It came

a bit too overcooked for my liking, but nevertheless, was quite flavorful. The sheets of fresh pasta enclosed slices of aubergine and zucchini and was a far cry from the lasagna al forno that is so widely known. The Gál Tibor Pinot Noir is an elegant wine to go with the veal chop, with engaging cherry and plum spices merging with velvety tannins and toasted oak aromas.

Desserts are first-rate at Rivalda. The American-style cheesecake with its lemony undertone is made with Philadelphia Cream Cheese for an authentic taste and consistency. The lemon-sabayon tart with a pine nut crust is light and creamy. This is accompanied by ice cream and real whipped cream.

Since I am a true chocoholic, the decadent chocolate ganache is my favorite. The warm soufflé has a crusty exterior and a gooey center filling the mouth and nose with a rich, dark chocolate sensation. A few words about the service: Győző, the maitre'd, is also a knowledgeable sommelier and host, and the waiters are attentive without being obsequious. I am sure that once you discover the star quality of Rivalda's food, atmosphere and service, you will return both for the matinee and evening performances.

A CHOCOLATE PRIMER

Couverture

This is a top-of-the-range type of chocolate. It is very pure with a high percentage of cocoa butter giving it excellent flavor. It is usually reserved for handmade chocolates and decoration and normally tempered before use.

Dark Plain Chocolate

This is the best chocolate to use in desserts, cakes, etc. but you must check the percentage of cocoa solids which vary in plain chocolate from 30% to 70%. The higher the percentage, the better the flavor.

Milk Chocolate

This popular chocolate is quite low in cocoa solids, only containing about 20%, and it is sweeter than plain chocolate. Generally, it should not be used for cooking.

White Chocolate

This chocolate gets its flavor from cocoa butter because it contains no cocoa solids. If you use it in cooking or for decorating, you must melt it very carefully.

WWW.CHOCOLATE.ALLINFO-ABOUT.COM

INFORMATION

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OPEN Monday-Sunday 11:30-23:30

AVERAGE COST OF A DINNER FOR TWO
12,000 HUF + wine

