

NIKO'S BISTRO

Solid fare at Niko's

Bill Kaufmann
Calgary Sun

January 5, 2007

We went trolling for a certain deli on the streets of Kensington, thinking the place sounded brand new.

It didn't seem to exist but we instead stumbled upon a smallish eatery in the same general area as the phantom deli.

"This used to be a smoked meat place," said our server.

Sure enough, we'd found our destination's successor, Niko's, which has called Kensington Rd. home for about 1 1/2 months.

Dovetailing with its urban setting are paintings of street scenes, most of them for sale.

On the opposite wall, padded orange and cream panels cradled photos of distant locales while a cutaway wall of the kitchen at the rear allowed us glimpses of a single chef plying his craft.

Niko's offers a very affordable Italian menu quite brief in its scope with four different pastas such as cannelloni (\$11) and manicotti (\$12).

Entrees number five, including salmon in lemon sauce (\$17) and chicken with prosciutto (\$18).

We led off our repast with the tempura coconut shrimp with sweet chili sauce (\$9).

The juicy shrimp were a tad greasy, which didn't much matter as we loved the slightly crunchy texture of the coconut-flavoured tempura coating which came alive when dipped in the fruity, moderately-spicy chili sauce.

This appetizer was sided with an excellent salad of field greens and tomatoes drenched with a deliciously tart balsamic vinaigrette.

The Caesar salad (\$7) was split between two plates for us by our server.

This was a dish pleasantly prepared with the freshest of romaine in an oil rather than cream-based dressing for a lighter treatment which I found refreshing.

Those with a penchant for heat in their starters might want to try the calamari all inferno (\$8) whose name speaks for itself.

Mizue began the night craving steak but ultimately fell for Niko's spaghetti frutti di mare (\$13). What appeared a modest helping was deceptive.

Mizue waded into a heaping portion of seafood pasta laced with mussels, calamari, shrimp and baby clams wedded to a sauce of extra virgin olive oil and white wine.

Every bite of even the most naked pasta was imbued with the flavour of the seafood.



My wife could only finish half and kicked herself upon forgetting the doggie bag when we left.

The veal osso buco (\$18) boasted a chunk of in-bone young beef smothered in a rich and zesty onion-carrot-tomato sauce stew that harkened back to my mom's hearty creations.

I hit a few gristly spots on what was otherwise a veal shank of tender texture.

Over salad and fresh vegetables, I opted for pasta with my dish, which turned out to be a deliciously-herbed rotini in tomato sauce.

For dessert, we split a serving of apple strudel (\$7), one of three house-crafted sweets on the menu.

The soft and tasty confection was teamed perfectly with a scoop of butterscotch-vanilla ice cream.

Niko's delivered a solid outing, making us forget the deli we'd been hunting.

•••••

NIKO'S BISTRO
1241 Kensington Rd. N.W.
403-270-0082

Italian cuisine

Hours:
Mon./Thurs.: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Sun./Sat.: 7:30 a.m. to close

Dress: Casual

Most entrees: \$18

Licensed

Major credit cards accepted.
Wheelchair access.

Sun rating (out of 5 stars)

