



## Hotel Hugo's Il Principe Restaurant: A Little New York Gem



When trying a new restaurant, you can get a feel for the energy of a place. It's more than an ambiance, interior design or proper lighting. It's more than the menu or the cuisine on the plate before you. Somehow, you pick up an atmosphere or a vibe off of the folks preparing the food and tending the tables. Put simply, you can gather how much the human element cares about their restaurant and how eager they are to present it to the public.

After spending several hour at New York's Il Principe, I headed away confident that no joint and no crew in New York is more quietly committed to doing their jobs.



Tucked away in stylish Soho neighborhood an easy distance from Chelsea, the West Village, Tribeca, etc., [Il Principe](#) resides on ground floor of the young, modern [Hotel Hugo](#). Its lobby Hugo Bar serves a mix of hotel guests and strolling locals with a mix of beers, rail drinks and in-house recipes. It was warm Manhattan night, so I tried the tart, cool Limonata Rosa (Vodka, Cointreau, fresh lemon, lime and cranberry). My striking dinner companion showed the way of responsibility with a James Bond-themed non-alcoholic mix, the May Day (cucumber, simple syrup, rosemary and ginger beer).

The multiple courses are dominantly Italian themed from antipasti to dolci. I recommend the Polpettine di Vitello (veal meatballs in a rich tomato sauce) the traditional Baked Gnocchi or the simple Calamari Fritti.

While many upscale Italian venues split Pasta and Secondi courses, offering smaller portions of both in succession. Il Principe offers their pasta as full plate entree items — with meat and seafood such as classic Ossobuco and Pan Seared Scallops highlighting the choices.

I was in an old world mood and tried one of the friendly house specialties, Lasagna alla Bolognese. To the restaurant's credit, it was served without any annoying fusion flares and arrived perfectly prepared. The lovely lady to my right (...Can you tell she might end up reading this?) chose the lighter Risotto prepared with peas, asparagus and fava beans. Served almost as a rice stew, the dish boasted a subtle, fresh and organic taste.



The best was yet to come. Dessert brought the speciality of the house. Executive Chef Kristine Mana-ay in charge of the entire menu, but her passion is pastry. She assembles the Tortino al Cioccolato, a deconstructed masterpiece of blended flavor (dark chocolate cake, amarena, white chocolate mousse and a dish of the Chef's handmade vanilla ice cream). The mixed textures and levels of sweet blend perfectly when assembled properly on the fork. After tasting it, the vixen beside almost passed out two or three times from unchecked rapture. We had to bring in a fan and oxygen to bring her back to reality.



Throughout the dinner, the staff was attentive and friendly. Chef Mana-ay visited the table, beaming that her dessert went over so well. Of course, the Il Principe crew was aware I was on hand to review the restaurant, so them treating us well isn't unexpected. But, I watched how the same team members handled other guests during the busy dinner hour. The same attention to detail was on display across the floor.

Prices are mid-range for New York, and the mood is casual and very low key. As the Hotel ages in Soho, I'd guess Il Principe will be there a long time to mature with it.

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