

HUFFPOST TASTE



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Off the Beaten Track, NYC's Il Principe Has High Style

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Il Principe is a stunningly good looking one-year-old restaurant in the Hugo Hotel, wedged in between TriBeCa, SoHo and the West Village, just across from the blocks-long UPS garage, in a quarter dubbed Hudson Square. Architect Marcello Pozzi has done a superb job of marrying the elegance of wood and industrial materials throughout, including the glass-enclosed lobby, the restaurant bar and a Rooftop Bar with a glorious 360-degree view of the city and the Hudson River. The lighting in the dining room bespeaks elegant modernity of a kind you'd find in Milan right now, the walls hung with striking black and white photos, the soft gray fabric chairs are very comfortable, and in the rear, beyond a glass wall, is an ivy-walled patio that seems miles away from the city's hectic pace, noise and UPS trucks.

Manila-born Chef Kristine Mana-ay, who has done stints at Waverly Inn and The Lion, is doing a fine rendering of Italian classic cuisine with considerable finesse, evident in her silken beef carpaccio dressed with Parmigiano (\$14). Bluefin tuna tartare (\$16) comes with avocado, a

pinch of peperoncino and some refreshing mint. There is also a good pizzette (\$18) of the thin-crust variety, with caramelized onion, fontina, a touch of thyme and a brushing of truffle oil.



The pastas were all excellent, from veal canelloni--a dish you don't see much anymore but should--in a light, creamy besciamella (\$22, as a main course portion), and perfectly cooked garganelli with veal sausage ragù, white wine sauce and truffled pecorino cheese (\$22). Rarely will you find the Piemontese signature pasta agnolotti del plin (below) on a menu this side of Turin, but, although Mana-ay's are considerably larger than the traditional thumbnail-sized nubbins of pasta, the dish as a whole is absolutely wonderful, with spinach, ricotta and a dressing of good butter and sage (\$17).



For a main course I recommend the simple dish of impeccably cooked, flaky branzino with lemon, olives and capers (\$27), or the chicken alla diavola (\$26) with crushed peperoncino that

makes this "devilishly" hot, potatoes and lots of garlic. In light of all this goodness, I was very disappointed in a ribeye (\$35) ordered medium rare, which came out barely pink and tasted more like pork than beef.

The desserts don't fall far from the usual listings, such as tiramisù (\$12), chocolate torta (\$12) and panna cotta (\$10), but they are well made, and I particularly liked the flaky sfogliatina of caramelized puff pastry, milk gelato, red wine-poached figs and caramel sauce (\$12). Each dessert comes with a recommendation for a dessert wine.

The wine list itself is of moderate size and very high priced, with far more bottles above \$100 than below.

I am always careful not to make too much of poor service on any given night, but, owing to the dining room being nearly empty, I would have thought more attention to the few occupied tables would be paid so that I wouldn't have to ask the waiter to come over or ask if the wine I ordered was going to come before I finished my appetizers. A busier restaurant is almost always a better one, so I hope this is the case at Il Principe, which deserves a wider audience. Il Principe is open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

IL PRINCIPE

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