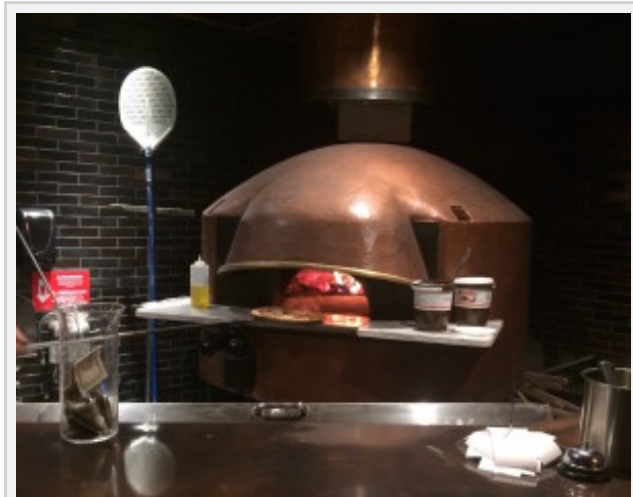




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# Downtown Crossing Gets a New Neapolitan Eatery: Mast

Posted November 21, 2014 by Cheryl Fenton in Dining Downtown: Restaurant Reviews



Mast's Chef Celio Pereira threw out a challenge. OK, he didn't *really* throw out a proper one. It was more of an insinuation of a challenge. With a restaurant name based on the Neapolitan term *o'mast* or "the master of one's craft," he and his culinary crew are basically inviting us in to prove this truth. I accept. With dishes from inspirational Italian cities like Palermo and Naples, Mast touts modern Neapolitan street food and craft cocktails. With just a few weeks on Boston's dining scene, I wanted to see exactly how crafty it was.

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Mast's authentic wood fire pizza oven. Photo Credit: Cheryl Fenton

My Pavlovian pizza response started as we walked in the door and right past the pizza oven.

There were piping hot pies coming out after kissing some real wood fire. The cozy upstairs was rich in dark wood, copper panels and exposed brick, and the patrons we passed on the way to our table were your friends and family. Well, they aren't necessarily *yours*, but they're someone's. The restaurant's casualness lends itself to random folks, from business people to families with kids in tow.

We began with small plates—some so fantastic I thought about rescinding my offer to share. The grilled baby octopus was number one. How can you go wrong with crispy (yet somehow juicy) tiny tentacles stacked atop grilled eggplant, watercress, fennel and tomatoes? Once I settled into the intense grilled flavor, quite a punch at first, I loved it. The stuffed Jerusalem artichoke was a close second—a juicy artichoke wrapped in crispy prosciutto di Parma. A dollop of Brugnato goat cheese sat sidecar to a molded Parmesan cup filled with watercress and tomatoes.

My dining partner dove into his Polpettine Trio of Angus meatballs. Swimming in sauce, they had a subtle freshness with tomato chunks a'plenty. His Caesar salad, however, was disappointing. The flavor needed something, anything, just please not more mayo. The presentation was nice – a romaine head draped in imported white anchovies. “Nice to look at, not nice to eat” should be reserved for art, not food.

For the main course, I chose Gnocchi all Sorrentina. Note: I'm forever in search of a contender to those my *nonna* used to make. They were pillowy, sharing deliciousness with



The stuffed Jerusalem artichoke. Photo Credit: Cheryl Fenton



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giant pieces of San Marzano tomatoes and fresh blobs of melty mozzarella. Not *nonna's*, but pretty damn good. Since freshness is obviously the key at Mast, the gentle flavors came through simply but perfectly. We only imagine entrées like the veal osso buco and parmigiana di Melanzane follow suit.



A trio of Angus beef meatballs. Photo Credit: Cheryl Fenton

Then came the Neapolitan pizza. We ordered La Dominica, topped with Sicilian eggplant, San Marzano tomato, Pecorino Romano and fior di latte. It was served on a small board, almost a “personal pizza” if you rocked a big appetite. Sad fact number one: It might have been the soft eggplant cubes, but it was very soggy in the center. Sad fact number two: The toppings were lacking. I’m no genius, but I’m pretty sure all slices should at least have one. Saving grace: the flavors were fantastic.



The amazing Nutella dessert pizza. Photo Credit: Cheryl Fenton

When did Mast get its pizza right? When they slathered on Nutella for a dessert pie. The crust carried this indulgent spread with perfection. There were mascarpone dollops, strawberries, crushed hazelnuts and powdered sugar. Fold your piece before you dive in or your clean shirt is a gooey goner. If La Dominica’s crust had been like this, I would have given it more respect.

Are the folks at Mast masters? It’s a little early to tell. But I’m willing to stick around to find out. Especially if they have more Nutella.