

**Paolo Tullio**



**EATING OUT**

Il Fornaio, Raheny, Dublin 5

**W**hen people ask me what I do, I tell them that I'm a restaurant reviewer. You'll notice that I don't say 'restaurant critic', because I don't believe my primary task is criticism. If I were to write a job description of what I do, I'd describe it like this: try to convey to your readers what the experience of being in a particular restaurant is like. It's not just the food - there's more to a restaurant experience than that - it's the room, the service, the general feel of it and of course, the relationship of the whole to what you pay.

Looking back over the years I seem to have been the harshest when reviewing Italian restaurants. That's probably because I know exactly how good Italian food can be and I get cross when I find bastardised recipes, poor quality ingredients and dishes that are Italian in name only. So it was good news this week when the *Piatto del Mese* project was launched by the Italian Academy of Cuisine and the Italian School of Cooking in conjunction with Findlater Grants.

All the restaurants involved in this project will offer a monthly dish - the *Piatto del Mese* - which will come with a selected wine to accompany it. A neat bonus is that when you order it, you get to keep the specially designed plate that it's served on. You can find out more on the web at [www.flavourofitaly.net](http://www.flavourofitaly.net).

Filled with a sense that good Italian food may finally become readily available here, I set out to try a small Italian restaurant in Kilbarrack called Il Fornaio. The artist Susan Morley was back in



# Talking Italian

Dublin after a spell in France, so we set off together.

Il Fornaio is in a small shopping centre at the strand end of Kilbarrack Road, which has the advantage of easy parking. From outside it looks like a takeaway, since the counters that serve pizzas and breads (*fornaio* means baker in Italian) are prominently displayed on your right as you enter. There are a few tables, perhaps ten, so the dining room doesn't seat many. The display counters that line one side of the room contain a fine array of Italian produce, including a large prosciutto, which looked like a Spanish Serrano, a mortadella, various other cured meats and cheeses, plus a lot of different breads.

As we sat down I didn't really

Food	4
Ambience	3
Service	3
Wine list	2
Value for money	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>16/25</b>



expect to see much on the menu other than snacky things, but it actually had a large number of choices, plus there was a blackboard with daily specials as well. I noticed too that there was a young chef just making pizzas, using a stone-floored electric oven.

I started by choosing a wine for us. Susie was keen to have a white wine, which turned out to be harder to find than I thought. The list is entirely Italian, which I liked, but it's more weighted to reds than it is to whites. There are some good wines on it and it's fairly priced, but finding a white was difficult once I'd eliminated the sweet dessert wines.

My first choice was unavailable, so I settled on a Sauvignon Blanc from Pescara called Perlei at €29.50, which unusually carried no vintage. It was drinkable, but that crisp acidity that you expect from a Sauvignon Blanc was entirely missing: instead it had a bland flatness of almost Swiss neutrality. Two half-litre bottles of mineral water completed our drinks order.

The menu is very reasonably

priced: the starters run from €4 to €6, there are salads from €6 to €9, pasta main courses are priced from €12 to €14 and main courses are from €14 to €16. Pizzas come in three sizes; normal, large and very big. The cheapest 9 inch - a plain Margherita - is €8 and an enormous pizza with all the fillings, which might feed a family, is €20.

From this long list of choices Susie picked the stuffed aubergines as her starter and then went for a pizza, the house special 'fornaio'. I chose one of my favourite starters, the *suppli*, which are breaded, and deep-fried rice balls filled with a cube of mozzarella. These are known in Italy as 'suppli al telefono', because the stringy mozzarella is reminiscent of telephone lines.

I do like bread with my meal, and on the blackboard it offered three rosetta rolls for €2. In Rome these rolls are a speciality; they're shaped vaguely like a rose, but incomprehensibly they're just crust - there's no soft centre of bread, just a hollow. Nostalgia prompted me to order them. We got three small loaves, a crust patterned with chicken wire and no empty centre. Decent bread it was too, but not a rosetta as I know it.

The starters were good and when the main courses came, they looked the part. Here's a tip: when you get a pizza set before you, look underneath it. What you ought to find is a golden colour and traces of semolina flour. Find that, and you've got a properly made base. That's just what Susie had, a well-made pizza with extra anchovies.

I'd ordered the porchetta, a staple food of every Italian festa. It's a whole pig, boned out and roasted head and all, which is served sliced on bread as a takeaway. Here it came on a plate with cubed potatoes flavoured with rosemary and the taste of the porchetta transported me instantly to festa market stalls.

Susie finished up with a sorbet, which came served in a coconut shell, while I had a passably good espresso. All in all this was a good meal; simple, unpretentious and authentic. The service was friendly, if a little uneven, and the meal was certainly good value. Our bill for the night came to a modest €83.50. **W**

Il Fornaio, 55 Kilbarrack Road, Raheny, Dublin 5. Tel: 01 8320277

[paolo@foodandwine.net](mailto:paolo@foodandwine.net)  
[www.tasteofireland.com](http://www.tasteofireland.com)