



TOM DOORLEY

Eats and drinks

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Arrivederci to Spag Bol, Campo ups the antipasti

■ CAMPO DE' FIORI

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THE kind of Italian restaurant we have in Ireland is generally not very Italian. It just tends to approximate to what we, in our northern European, damp climate think of as being Italian. Which means a lot of tomato sauce.

There are exceptions, of course, but any Italian restaurant that wants to stay in business has to make certain accommodations to the Irish psyche. Most manage to do it by simply throwing in the towel and doing variations of spag bol and pizza; a few, a mere handful, manage to do something that would go down well back home.

Campo de' Fiori in Bray is one such exception. It's very much part of this seaside town (for a start, it's right beside the Fun Palace) but it's also one of the few restaurants in Ireland where I've had a waiter enthuse about my choice of wine on the basis that it's from his own village in the Alto Adige (a cool climate Cabernet Franc, as it happens).

I adjourned there on a January evening during that time of the year that is truly in limbo, when the early dusk underlines the fact that Christmas is well over and before we have sufficiently recovered from the festive season to embrace eating out as we do at other, more favoured, times of the year.

I also adjourned there with two daughters, enjoying their release from the confines of boarding school for another few days. I should explain that they have boarding school appetites which, like nature, are red in tooth and claw. The fact that they were utterly defeated before the half-way stage suggests that the portions at Campo de' Fiori are more than generous.

We shared a platter of antipasto which comprised a selection of Italian cheeses (including chunks of aged Parmesan dipped in a reduction of Balsamic vinegar, which was outstanding – a kind of refined Italian variation on cheese and chutney but, actually, much more than this would suggest); impeccably marinated olives, Parma ham, spiced salami and smoky speck.

A basket of breads included the lightest, featheriest focaccia imaginable, salty and redolent of rosemary. A bottle of very green, very peppery olive oil stands on every table.

The girls went for pizzas: huge affairs, with a light crust and only just cooked. One came with calamari and shellfish (in their shells; the removal of the shells taking quite a



while) but, very correctly without even the faintest suspicion of cheese, either mozzarella or Parmesan. The seafood element in this €14.50 pizza would have made a meal in itself. Our other pizza, like

Campo de' Fiori: Generous portions of superb, authentic Italian cuisine

this one, involved a rich tomato sauce but with the addition of mozzarella over which, after cooking, sheets of prosciutto were draped, melting slightly in the process.

It amounted to a very savoury combination of luscious cheesy, tomatoey, salty, meaty loveliness.

Neither of my hungry daughters managed to get more than half-

way through these pizzas. I saluted their tenacity.

FOR me there was a plate of raviolini – little pasta packets – filled with a paste of what tasted uncannily like fresh ceps or, as the Italians would say, porcini, bathed in a rich, creamy sauce of dolcelatte gorgonzola. But the richness was brilliantly cut by a top dressing of finely sliced and very lightly cooked radicchio, that lovely dark red and rather bitter Italian salad leaf. It had yin and yang: creaminess, earthiness on the one hand and sharp bitterness on the other. Delightful.

We shared a plate of ice creams – chocolate, strawberry and quite exceptional vanilla – and everyone got a taste from the glass of vin santo, the Tuscan dessert wine which Campo de' Fiori seems to do better than most. An espresso ristretto was straight from the textbook. With vast pizzas at €14.50 or less, and my ravioli at €17.50, Campo di Fiori delivered on quality and value.

wine CHOICE

CAMPO de' Fiori has a decently priced and completely Italian list which includes some rarities such as Sandrone Dolcetto d'Alba at €34.50, Realda Anselmi at €41

and Brancaia Tre at €42. My own top choice would be Sugana, a Cabernet Franc from the Alto Adige at €27.50: dark, peppery and fresh.

smart MONEY

Vast pizzas start at €10.90.



little BITES

■ THIS week I'll be eating.... buttermilk chicken. I'll marinate chicken legs and thighs in buttermilk with some crushed garlic for a few hours. Then I'll toss them in flour seasoned with lots of black pepper and a little salt and shallow-fry them in rapeseed oil for about ten minutes. Finish them in the oven at 200C for a further 20 minutes. Lovely with a crisp green salad.



■ EVERYBODY is looking for value these days and this is probably the best time of the year to look for winter breaks in some of the country's best hotels. Your best bet is www.pigsback.com where you can find deals on short breaks, with dinner, at the kind of places that normally remain somewhat out of reach.

■ THIS is the peak time for so-called detox diets. To be honest, your kidneys and liver detox all the time, so don't be taken in by 'quick fixes'. Just go easy on alcohol, eat plenty of fresh vegetables and salad and avoid refined carbs like sugar and white flour (which includes pasta and white bread). Real food, cooked simply at home by yourself, is the best diet!

■ RACHEL ALLEN has been pilloried for shooting pheasants. Maybe it's time we thought about where our food comes from. If your protein is from animal sources, it means a creature was killed – maybe we should salute Rachel for doing the hard bit herself. And if you've heard cattle lowing for their lost calves, you know even milk, cream or cheese don't come without some suffering.



Jamie Oliver

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