

o s t e r i a

ILCENTRO

by **charity ohlund** | photography by **brooke vandever**

Taking a first bite of Cannelloni at Osteria IL Centro is like falling in love. You tell yourself things like, “Go slow. Take time to enjoy the moment. Don’t go losing your mind.” But just like in love, logic and rational thinking quickly evaporate because quite simply—you just want more.

Chef Jaime Salgado’s version of Cannelloni consists of two soft crepes filled with tender pieces of sautéed chicken, spinach and mushrooms sitting on a warm bed of tomato cream sauce (not too rich, not too runny). I was told during my recent visit to Osteria IL Centro that the Cannelloni is a clear customer favorite. After tasting it, that seemed like a pretty obvious statement.

Osteria IL Centro has been situated on the hilltop corner of 51st and Main in Kansas City’s South Plaza neighborhood for 17 years now. And if the consistently delicious northern Italian cuisine isn’t enough to make you fall in love, the intimate ambiance will certainly push you over the edge.

Osteria IL Centro’s cozy dining room has 17 tables covered in white tablecloths, and a small bar that pours wine from an extensive list that has repeatedly won the Wine Spectator “Best of Award of Excellence.” Osteria IL Centro strikes the perfect balance between a place to impress your client and a place to impress your date.

Even general manager Brent Wittrock couldn’t escape the love inside Osteria IL Centro. He met his wife there. “A regular customer called me over to the table and said, ‘You’re single, aren’t you, Brent?’” Brent recalls. “I said yes, and he said, ‘Meet Katie.’ And that was it.” (The Wittrocks have since had a baby, and they celebrated their second wedding anniversary last month.)

Half of Osteria IL Centro’s customers eat there at least once a week. Perhaps the folks in the neighborhood surrounding the restaurant don’t want the rest of us to know about things like the Goat Cheese and Garlic Spread appetizer or the decadent Chicken Walnut Pasta with gorgonzola cream sauce.







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But I consider it my duty to spill more secrets. I did not stop with the Cannelloni. Next up was the Sausage and Pepper Pasta, which pairs grilled local sausage from Krizman's with penne pasta, red peppers and sweet onions in a tomato-herb sauce. In Italian cooking, it all comes down to the sauce. And Chef Salgado got it right again.

The lollipop Lamb Chops were marinated and grilled to a perfect medium rare and topped with a rosemary brandy sauce. My dining partners and I were trying to act polite while sharing this plate, but there sure were a lot of elbows strategically blocking access.

Dessert presented me with something I had never seen before and considering the amount of dessert I've ordered and consumed in my life, that's a rarity. The Gelato Ball is a wild berry gelato formed into a croquet-sized ball and coated in a dark chocolate shell with fresh raspberry sauce. Beautiful, fun and so yummy.

I truly fell in love with everything about Osteria IL Centro. I'll be returning soon for a date night with my husband. And now that the season is upon us, Osteria IL Centro is the perfectly authentic Kansas City spot for a special holiday party, rehearsal dinner or business meeting. Private event space and banquet menus are available.

Whether you are already in love, looking for love or just seeking out a brief affair with a plate of pasta, Osteria IL Centro has what your heart (and stomach) desires. ■

For more information, visit Osteria IL Centro at 5101 Main Street in Kansas City, Missouri, call them at 816-561-2369 or visit them online at osteriailcentro.com. Their hours are Monday–Thursday: 4:00pm–10:00pm; Friday–Saturday: 4:00pm–11:00pm. Closed on Sunday.



A self-professed foodie whose kitchen essentials include bacon, blue cheese, a French press and Sriracha, Charity Ohlund can be found eating her way through Kansas City's culinary scene with her chef husband. Her food and restaurant writing has been published in *Reader's Digest* and *KC Magazine*, and on FrothyGirlz.com and Yahoo.com. After graduating from the University of Kansas with a journalism degree, Charity worked for Fairmont Hotels & Resorts in Scottsdale and Chicago before moving to Kansas City in 2006. When she isn't cooking, eating or chasing after her two young sons, Charity is busy running Maddy Nash, the personalized clutch purse company she founded last year. Maddy Nash bags can be found at Clique Boutique, TallulahBelle's and at MaddyNash.com.

photo provided by heather morrow of hocus focus photography