

RESTAURANT UPDATE

GIACOMO'S
3215 Westheimer Houston 77098 713.522.1934

Just a block or so east of Lamar High School on Westheimer is a little jewel of a restaurant, the kind that would be a success in Manhattan, Paris, Rome, or any other place where educated palates gather. Owner Lynette Hawkins, whose former La Mora on the edge of Montrose on Lovett Blvd was a Houston fixture for years, has created a different concept, this time just on the edge of River Oaks. Our guess is that her takeout business is huge, and why wouldn't it be, when few households have the talent or energy to prepare such a variety of mouthwatering Italian recipes at such reasonable prices. Counter service rules here—many items are on warm plates for you to scrutinize before ordering, and some come prepared to order from the kitchen, just behind the line. Cichetti, or little dishes of antipasti are available from \$4-6 each, and a combo plate can be made to your personal order. Panini include Porchette (roasted fennel pork), Formaggio (cheese & truffle oil), and Spicy shrimp salad on toasted baguette. Crostini comes with a choice of three spreads: Pomodoro, tomato basil garlic & oil; Pesto of mushroom & olive; Tuscan chicken liver pate; and Goat cheese & sun dried tomatoes. A wide selection of pastas includes Porcini potato gnocchi; Pasta stuffed with chicken & pork in chicken & meat broth; and Ravioli of Swiss chard & goat cheese in sage butter. Entrees delight the eyes and the tummy, and may be Pork loin chop, breaded & sautéed; Grilled whole rainbow trout; or Grilled marinated hanger steak. Vegetables are available as sides, such as Broccoli with garlic, anchovy, & olive oil; Cannellini, tomato, garlic, and sage; or Potatoes onions, & tomatoes. If you are a lover of sweets, save room for a Lemon tart; Chocolate hazelnut cupcake; or Selection of ice cream and sherbets, a changing choice of six flavors. Choose from sixty different wines to complement your meal.

The Grove
1611 Lamar Houston 77010 713.337.7314

Situated in a stunning setting, with surrounding, soaring glass walls, diners are treated to views of Houston's burgeoning skyline in the background, with a dense forest of mature oaks in the foreground. During a recent visit, these oaks were festooned with large illuminated orbs, decorated with a variety of images. And then the eyes came to rest on the unique menu, a menu with a Southwestern flair, fashioned as it is by the owners of RDG (formerly Café Annie). Smoked Texas quail skewers; Fresh fish ceviche; Puget Sound mussels with shoe string fries and house made sausage; Gulf coast shrimp burger; Pulled rotisserie chicken sandwich, with cremini mushrooms, white cheddar, grilled onion, and aioli; Fried oyster BLT with homemade tartar and marinated black eyed peas; or House made lamb burger, served with cucumber yogurt and Texas goat cheese. Main dishes may include Wood grilled salmon filet, with grilled corn, jicama, and tomato vinaigrette; Gulf shrimp brochette with braised baby carrots, celery root, and almond oregano pesto, or Wood grilled skirt steak, with chili cheese fries, tomatillo, and fresh jalapenos; Hill Country venison with butternut squash, Brussels sprouts, bacon, and red wine; or Local flounder with baby leeks, roasted potatoes, piperade sauce, and clams. Sides include Grove mashed potatoes, caramelized cauliflower, Grilled corn with chili & lime; and Roasted winter squash. For dessert, the kitchen presents Texas pecan & brown butter cake served with vanilla ice cream; Frozen lime mousse with toasted coconut, pineapple, and coconut crème anglaise; and Brioche bread pudding, served with apple butter, oatmeal lace cookie, and vanilla ice cream.

Factoid: The croissant, a staple of breakfast in France and elsewhere, actually comes from Vienna, where legend has it that early rising bakers, one morning during a siege by the Ottoman Turks, heard muffled tunneling noises under the city's walls while everyone else slept, and notified authorities. The attack by the enemy sappers was repelled, and to commemorate the victory, the baker's guild created a pastry in the shape of the Turkish crescent (croissant in French). When an Austrian baker later moved to Paris to open a shop, he took the new pastry with him, and...Voila!

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Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years. Copyright 2009 Ray Hankamer, Hankamer Commercial/Hankamer & Associates.