

PRINCETON PACKET

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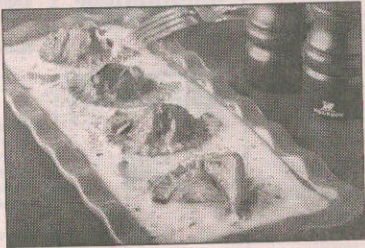
IN THE KITCHEN

The handiwork of sunny Italy, in two aspects

By Pat Tanner
Special Writer

After five years of doing business in a charming two-story spot at the corner of Nassau and Harrison streets in Princeton, Tuscan Hills, which imports home furnishings, accessories, and gift items from Italian artisans, relocated in April to a light-filled, expansive spot in an historic building on Route 27 in Kingston. The shop's grand re-opening celebration reflected the interconnections among the area's small businesses — especially its eateries.

To complement the Italian wines at the open house, owner Greg Evans called upon his friend Andrea Di Meglio of Luca's Ristorante in Somerset and Flemington for light Italian fare. "Andrea was one of the first people who came into our old store," recalls Mr. Evans. "He bought antique wall sconces for his Somerset restaurant. We built up a relationship and I helped out with other things for the restaurant, including tables and chairs. We're now good friends. I always look to Luca's for my special events."



Chef Andrea Di Meglio's Agnolotti di Cacao as served at Luca's Ristorante.

everyone is happy that the building is in use and that the historic exterior has been maintained."

Tuscan Hills is situated in a venerable structure that started out life in 1878 as the Union Line Hotel. In recent years it had been vacant and in disrepair, but was bought and renovated by brothers Carlo and Raoul Momo, whose restaurant group owns Mediterra, Teresa Caffe, Wither-spoon Bread — all in Princeton — and Eno Terra, which is a few hundred yards down the road from Tuscan Hills.

Originally, Greg Evans thought the Momo brothers had other plans for the space. "But I was at Eno Terra, which was buying knives from me, and I ran into Carlo Momo. He said the space was still open and the two of us went to look at it right then and there. What's great is that it allows us to display our furniture. In the Princeton space we could fit one credenza, one dining table, and maybe one bed, upstairs. Here, on just one side of the showroom, we have five dining tables, a queen bed, and a couple of credenzas." Not to mention 75 parking spaces. "The real clincher was that the space next door — the former Union Line Garage — was available, so I use that for storage."



Photo courtesy of Tuscan Hills

The expansive new digs of Tuscan Hills importers in Kingston.

The most surprising result of the move, Mr. Evans says, is that the new store has attracted a lot of people who live in Princeton but who somehow never visited the old spot. As for his regular customers, Mr. Evans says, "only one person hasn't absolutely loved the change. Most people comment that it's so nice to be able to actually see things. But this one client, he misses the old nooks and crannies."

Among the dishes served by Luca's was the easy to make bruschetta recipe, below, which features the fresh, bright acid of cherry tomatoes paired with lush burrata (fresh mozzarella with a creamy center). At the open house, I was particularly intrigued by pasta envelopes (agnolotti) the color of milk chocolate. They had an elusive flavor that gave depth to the filling of butternut squash puree. That elusive flavor, it turns out, is chocolate — cocoa powder to be precise — and it adds a depth to fresh pasta the same way it adds depth to Mexican moles.

AGNOLOTTI DI CACAO

(Cocoa Ravioli Stuffed with Butternut Squash in Herbed Cream Sauce)

Andrea Di Meglio, Chef & Co-owner, Luca's Ristorante

For the filling:

- 1 small butternut squash
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup mascarpone cheese
- 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
- 1 tablespoon Parmigiano Reggiano cheese
- 1/4 cup brandy
- 1/4 teaspoon each salt and black pepper
- 1 minced shallot

For the herbed cream sauce:

- 3 tablespoons butter