

Irish Independent

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# WEEKEND

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## Le Vin Irlandais

How one Irish  
family's French  
adventure nearly  
turned sour

**MARY KENNY:** On mad fad diets

**PAOLO TULLIO**  
At last - Ireland's top  
food critic finds a  
proper Italian  
restaurant



## Paolo Tullio



### EATING OUT

Via Veneto,  
58, Weafer St,  
Enniscorthy,  
Co Wexford

**T**HIS WEEK I had a really fine Italian meal. That would be a banal statement if I'd just come back from Italy, but I haven't. I've returned from Enniscorthy.

Just to be clear, when I say an 'Italian meal', I mean a meal like you'd get in a restaurant in Italy. That's a different beast from a meal you might enjoy in any one of the hundreds of restaurants in Ireland that call themselves 'Italian'. It's different because what we very rarely get in Ireland under the banner of 'Italian Restaurant' is authenticity. The road to hell isn't paved with good intentions, it's paved with deep-pan pizzas, carbonara with cream, Caprese salad with pesto and salads with raw peppers.

Authenticity is rare. It's rare because lots of Italian restaurateurs believe that Irish people wouldn't like the real thing, so they bastardise the recipes. Actually any Irish people I've met who've gone to Italy like the food there just fine, so it's decidedly odd that authentic Italian food is so hard to find here.

I'll be honest, a few people had told me about Via Veneto in Enniscorthy and I'd listened politely, thinking that, if you couldn't get a proper Italian meal in the capital, then Enniscorthy was unlikely to do the job any better. When I was told for the fourth or fifth time I relented, called my neighbour, Lisa McMullan — a fine cook herself — and we set off for the south-east on an evening that made Noah's deluge look like an April shower.

We found Via Veneto easily enough by following the simple directions 'just keep going uphill and it's on the right'. Inside, it's spacious, comfortable in a cluttered sort of way, linen on the tables, Italian foodstuffs on display and posters of *La Dolce Vita* everywhere. If you're a film fan you'll



# Real Italian

Food 5  
Ambience 4  
Service 4  
Wine list 5  
Value for money 4

Total 22/25

### LITTLE ITALY

Finding authentic Italian cooking has never been easy in Ireland. Too many compromises are always made with the ingredients, like bacon instead of pancetta in carbonara, bacon instead of guanciale in Amatriciana, jamon Serrano instead of prosciutto. There's no excuse for that today, every possible foodstuff from any part of the world can be sourced in Ireland.

Good Italian food can be found. In Wexford Town, Roberto Pons makes fine food in his *La Dolce Vita*, but it's daytime only. The gifted Roberto Morsiani has retired, so Wexford is now Ireland's Little Italy.

know that *La Dolce Vita* was a film by Federico Fellini starring Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg. Much of its action took place on the Via Veneto, one of Rome's chicest streets, hence the relevance of the posters. I was about 13 when I saw the movie, an impressionable age, and the next time I was in Rome I sat at a pavement table in Harry's Bar, just like Marcello, and felt oh so sophisticated.

As soon as we began to look down the rather long menu it became clear that this wasn't a run-of-the-mill, ersatz Italian restaurant. It had the unmistakable feel of the genuine article. No pineapple pizzas here.

Starters are straightforward enough: a Caprese salad, chilli prawns, mussels in white wine sauce, grilled vegetables, a cold meat platter and a scamorza. Naturally this last offering caught my eye. Scamorza is aged and slightly-smoked mozzarella and, although it changes in texture, it retains that property of mozzarella to melt and go stringy. Last time I had it grilled was at the top of a mountain pass, Forca d'Acero, which leads from Lazio into

Abruzzo. It was mid-winter and the snow was several metres thick, so this hot dish wasn't just nourishing, but warming too.

Seven pasta dishes followed, all classics, and then the mains. These were divided between red meats, chicken, fish and house specialities and, finally, a page of pizzas. The pizzas were exactly the ones you'd find in a pizzeria in Italy, so once again I felt this restaurant was offering authenticity.

The wine list is extraordinary. It's without a doubt the best list of Italian wines I've seen in Ireland. It's long, the choices are many and varied and there's a lot of wines in the €18 to €25 bracket. There are fine wines too, even a 2003 Sassicaia. I also liked the fact that the better wines are well-described with tasting notes and excerpts from reviews. I chose a white, a Vermentino from the north of Sardinia, which was priced at €24.50.

Lisa started with the cold meat platter, which was prosciutto, a spicy salami, a standard salami and

a bowl of spiced olives. I couldn't resist the scamorza, which came melted in a dish and was topped with prosciutto. Maybe a touch fattening, but totally delicious.

For main courses, Lisa had chosen the sea-bass, which was a very large fillet — certainly not farmed — sitting on a bed of aubergine puree. It was perfectly cooked and the combination worked very well.

I had the saltimbocca alla Romana, a classic Roman dish of sliced veal with prosciutto and sage cooked in white wine. Purists might argue that it ought to be served rolled up rather than flat, but it was definitely the tastiest saltimbocca I've had — anywhere.





## Myles McWeeney



**S**ANDRA BOWES, who is from a farming background, was born and brought up in Buenos Aires in Argentina. On graduating, she moved to London and a career in investment banking and a MBA. She met and married an Italian banker and they moved to Dublin when he was transferred to take charge of an Italian bank here.

Her first few months in Ireland were spent on crutches following an

# Fine investment

accident and, to pass the time, she signed up for an Irish Wine Development Board WSET course. Her lecturer, Mary O'Callaghan, encouraged her to spread the word about her country's top-class wines and so Bowes & Co Wines Ltd was born. Over the last few years Sandra's range of top-class wines has won a lot of fans in the restaurant and retail trade here for their quality and honest prices.

Sandra Bowes' wines can be found in leading independents such as Donnybrook Fair, Mortons, the Hole in the Wall, Gibneys of Malahide or, by the case, from Bowes & Co. All details are on the company's excellent website, [www.boweswines.com](http://www.boweswines.com).



In truth the veal was a little tough, but it tasted so good I left not a scrap.

After this we had little appetite left for desserts. But we did share an Italian cheese-cake made with ricotta. What this did was transport me to Italy instantly in a Proustian

sort of way, since the taste was exactly what I remembered from my youth.

Good espressos ended what had been a pleasurable evening. Pleasurable because it ended a long wait — a wait for an authentic Italian restaurant. The new M11 means that Enniscorthy isn't the far away place it once was, it's accessible and that's a big plus for anyone who wants to try food like you'd get in Italy. It doesn't hurt the pocket either, our bill came to €84.50. **W**

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### Familia Cassone Cabernet Sauvignon/Malbec 2005, €11.50

I love these two blended together. The pronounced fruit from the Malbec and the rounded Cabernet tannins soften the whole structure of the wine, leaving it without any astringency or harshness. Soft, easy drinking, pleasant ripe-red and blackberry fruit with good body and length.

### Valentin Bianchi Arrabal Merlot 2005, €10

The Valentin Bianchi winery is quality-driven and this, although inexpensive, is delicate and intense on the palate without being overpowering. It is an easy drinking medium-bodied

wine with attractive clean-fruit aromas, graceful and nicely rounded.

### Tittarelli Family Reserva Tempranillo 2004, €16

I find this wine very elegant, starting from its remarkable deep-red colour with notable black tones. Some 30pc has been aged in new French oak and it will improve with age. It has a complex nose and it is rich and structured on the palate, with exuberant notes of ripe blackcurrant with touches of cinnamon, almonds, leather and dark chocolate. Good length and robust tannins. A full-bodied wine to enjoy at a dinner party!

### Haut Vol Xama Kaye Malbec 2004, €20

This is a fabulous Malbec with a subtle wooden touch and 30pc has been aged in new French oak. It really shows the elegance of a great Malbec, with delicate fruit of cherries, a good acidity, pleasant tannins and a balanced long, lingering end.

### Lagarde Classic Sauvignon Blanc 2006, €15

What I like about Argentinean whites is that they have a nice acidity, making them crisp, cleansing the palate and supporting all the lovely fruit. This Sauvignon Blanc is very fresh with lovely pronounced green apple, melon and grapefruit aromas.

Likewise, it has huge length. Elegant and crisp at any time with anyone!

### Haut Vol Xama Che Torrontes 2006, €13

Torrontes is one of Argentina's most interesting white grapes and is closely related to the Europe's Moscatels. It is a delicate, beautifully-perfumed grape, and this wine is medium dry with subtle rose, jasmine, geranium and mango aromas. Great with spicy foods or on its own.

