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Salumeria: A Feast Fit for an Emperor

Uilliam Lamberti's new Italian venture works wonders with Russian-sourced cuisine

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SALUMERIA

A stone's throw away from Patriarch's Ponds, just off the trendy Malaya Bronnaya Ulitsa, the restaurateur Uilliam Lamberti and businessman Vladimir Davidi have sought to add yet another touch of Italy in the heart of the Russian capital with their new venture, Salumeria. And who would complain?

Italian cuisine has long been popular in the "Third Rome," but Lamberti and Davidi have gone back to basics to provide as authentic an Italian culinary experience as possible. Indeed, these rooms are packed to the brim with a wide enough selection of traditional delicacies to have satisfied even the most hedonistic of Roman emperors.

Salumeria offers an exquisite interior, with gleaming white tiles, weather-beaten columns

and luxurious wooden furniture in warm autumnal tones. To the left of the entranceway is a combined bar and open kitchen with a vintage, bronze coffee machine on proud display.

Tables should be booked in advance — otherwise you are ushered to the bar with very vague perspectives on when exactly you'll be seated. But the cocktail selection at the bar makes for fine company. Try the Barolo Negroni (600 rubles) topped off with a Barolo Chinato flavored wine with a bitter kick. If you're feeling a little more bohemian, try the Dolce Vita cocktail (750 rubles) with a rich burst of passion fruit and a side glass of Italian sparkling wine.

The more promising the aperitif, the more unfortunate the long-awaited frantic shuffle from bar to table in a packed restaurant on a Sunday night. Salumeria's sleek veneer was also eroded somewhat by the salty head waitress readily "misplacing" the Dolce Vita cocktail during the migration. When quizzed as to whether a replacement would be provided, the request was not met with understanding. The hostess sauntered off, dreamily waving her cape behind her, providing a very valuable lesson — if you want your Dolce Vita, you should fight for it.

That said, the culinary experience quickly erases any gripes with the⊠ service staff. Start with the burrata and marinated artichokes for 750 ⊠rubles ($13), a cheese-based delicacy from southern Italy. According to ⊠the waiter, the cheeses in Salumeria are locally sourced in Russia and ⊠made by an Italian community. The attempt at "import substitution" is ⊠laudable — the mozzarella exterior gently gives way to the creamy ⊠abundance of Stracciatella within. For a traditional Italian meat-based ⊠delicacy, try porchetta (300 rubles/100 grams) — baked pork with herbal ⊠stuffing.

Perhaps predictably, the pizza deserves some ⊠acknowledgement. The restaurant's handsome stone-bake ovens were ⊠certainly put to good use in crafting Pizza Salumeria (750 rubles). A ⊠tale as old as time — prosciutto, mozzarella balls and Parmesan cheese —⊠ no nonsense, and this is exactly what people come here for. If you're ⊠feeling adventurous try the octopus and potato pizza (800 rubles).

Vox⊠ populi have declared the restaurant to have "damn fine coffee" — a rumor⊠ I am pleased to confirm. Finish the meal off with caffe al cioccolato ⊠(200 rubles) which blends a nice, strong espresso with a glass smeared ⊠in melted dark chocolate. Or if you want to step up your cappuccino ⊠game, try cappuccino zabaione (300 rubles) —with whipped custard serving⊠ as the foam.

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