

TUSCANY

A tradition of old world ambiance and fine Italian fare continues at this Oak Brook standby

Take one experienced restaurateur, add his passion for Italian cuisine, sprinkle with a warm, family-like atmosphere, and what you have is Tuscany, a restaurant well-versed in northern Italian cuisine and tradition.

Located across the street from the Oakbrook Shopping Center, Tuscany is one of some 15 restaurants, cafes and other food-providing venues owned and operated by the Phil Stefani Signature Restaurants, which has been spreading its recipe of "food, family and tradition" across the Chicagoland area for more than 20 years. Phil Stefani, along with his Uncle Lino, opened his first restaurant in 1980 in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, creating a dining experience centered around authentic Italian cuisine and values. Oak Brook's Tuscany, which opened in 1994, is an extension of these noble ideals, and it shows.

Tuscany shines with the same casual, family-like atmosphere of an Italian trattoria. Wander the tables and you'll find families

conversing between bites of pasta, as well as couples sharing a lovely moment over a glass of wine. The décor is unpretentious — fresco-style artwork adorns the walls and copper pots and pans and strings of garlic and peppers hang in the partially open kitchen.

Many people contribute to the menus of the Stefani restaurants, but it is Executive Chef Efrain Benitez who puts the finishing touches on Tuscany's menu. A Stefani Restaurant veteran, Benitez has run the Tuscany kitchen for eight years, and his direction and flair for taste and presentation has helped Tuscany attract a mix of out-of-town visitors and regular clientele.

For starters, select from a variety of antipasto. The Polpi alla Griglia Piccantini (\$10), a tender, marinated grilled baby octopus on a bed of radicchio, comes highly recommended. Or try the Cozze al Guazzetto (\$10), flavorful, steamed mussels in a lightly spiced fresh tomato broth. Instead of a traditional salad, go with the Caprese (\$7), a refreshing alternative of fresh mozzarella, sliced tomatoes, olive oil and fresh basil. A variety of soups and other salads are also available.

All pastas at Tuscany are either made fresh from scratch or shipped in from Italy. Suggestions include Ravioli Pera alla Giorgio (\$14.75), a rich dish featuring pear and parmigiana stuffed ravioli with a puree of pine nuts, walnuts, cashews, sun-dried tomatoes, fresh pears and mascarpone cheese.



QUICK FACTS

TUSCANY

1425 W. 22nd St., Oak Brook
630 990-1993

Recommended Dishes:

Polpi alla Griglia Piccantini, Ravioli Pera alla Giorgio, Linguine con Scampi Fra Diavola, Spaghettini al Capriccio di Mare, Pollo allo Spiedo and Salsiccia con Fagioli

Cost: Entrées: \$11-\$23

Hours: Lunch M-F 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Dinner M-Th 5 p.m. - 10 p.m., F-Sat 5 p.m. - 11 p.m., Sun 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Extras: Carry out, three private dining rooms, bar, valet parking, live entertainment. Separate deli open 6:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

For a little more kick, go with the Linguine con Scampi Fra Diavola (\$21), a linguine with scampi, garlic, olive oil, crushed hot pepper and marinara sauce with a hint of cream. Seafood lovers will enjoy the Spaghettini al Capriccio di Mare (\$20), a sort of un-stewed, pasta version of bouillabaisse, with garlic, olive oil, calamari, octopus, mussels, clams, shrimp, fresh tomato and herbs.

Tuscany doesn't offer a wide variety of fish on its regular menu, but rather features a different fresh fish daily, including striped bass, sea bass, tilapia and tuna. As for meats, Tuscany offers chops, veal and ribeyes, but go for one of the Tuscan specialties. These are dishes native to the Tuscan region of Italy and include a succulent Pollo allo Spiedo (\$15.25), a whole chicken

roasted on a wood burning rotisserie; Salsiccia con Pepperoni (\$14), grilled sausage with sautéed onions and bell peppers; and Salsiccia con Fagioli (\$14), baked sausage with olive oil, garlic and sage served with navy beans and fresh tomato sauce.

Pizza is also offered, with all pies baked in a wood burning oven. Standouts include the Margherita (\$8), made with fresh tomato sauce, mozzarella and fresh basil, and the Tuscany (\$9), a unique pizza made with goat cheese, grilled portobello and oven-dried tomatoes.

Dolce include rich, cream-filled cannoli, flourless chocolate cake and a melt-in-your-mouth tiramisu. Enjoy it with a cappuccino or espresso, and finish your meal with a grappa — an Italian after-dinner liqueur.

Tuscany also offers an extensive wine list filled with a variety of California and Italian wines, from the popular Chianti to fruity Pinot Grigio. But the true treasures are the Tuscan wines, including vintages from Ruffino, Brunello Di Montalcino and Terra Bianca Campaccio.

After dinner, drop by the bar for some live entertainment, featured Monday through Saturday. Performances range from a jazz trio to singers performing classic favorites and modern hits.

Tuscany's deli, open from 6:30 a.m. until 2 p.m., serves breakfast staples such as eggs, bagels and sausage, as well as cold sandwiches and pastas. ❖