

**SCAN ME** **FIRST TIME CUSTOMERS 40% OFF** **CANNABIS 21+™** **\$43 818 8TH** **BUY (1) GET A GELATO CART FOR \$1.00**

SHOPEC21PLUS.COM

VOLUME 25  
ISSUE 2

February 2024



Follow us on social media  
[sdnews.com](http://sdnews.com)

San Diego **Uptown News // DOWNTOWN NEWS**

Gaslamp • East Village • Little Italy • Bankers Hill • Hillcrest • North Park • South Park

[sdlatinofilm.com](http://sdlatinofilm.com)  
**31st SAN DIEGO LATINO FILM FESTIVAL**  
PURCHASE YOUR PASSES TODAY! **MARCH 14/24**

CRIME P. 3



Gossip Grill arsonist sentenced

ARTS P.4



Sue Palmer: 50 years of music

HISTORY P. 5



Fashion exhibit at Villa Montezuma

FOOD AND DRINK P. 10



Build-your-own pasta at Rusticucina

# Balboa Park

Explore San Diego's crown jewel



**TRADITION VS MODERNITY IN KOREAN ART**  
Page 6

**BOTANICAL GARDEN RECONSTRUCTION + MUSEUM MONTH GROWS**  
Page 7

**THE NAT'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY GARDEN + GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGNING**  
Page 8

**PLAZA DE PANAMA ART INSTALLATION + VISIT MARSTON HOUSE**  
Page 9

**Contact us**  
**Editorial/Letters**  
858-270-3101 x136  
[drew@sdnews.com](mailto:drew@sdnews.com)  
**Advertising**  
619-961-1958  
[miker@sdnews.com](mailto:miker@sdnews.com)  
**sdnews.com**  
San Diego Community Newspaper Group

**MISSION HILLS FINANCIAL**  
Call (619)294-9420 Today to schedule your **FREE** Financial Planning & Investment Portfolio Review

*Over Three Decades of experience serving San Diego's financial needs*

Mission Hills Financial, Inc. The Retirement Income Specialists  
Securities through United Planners Financial Services, Member FINRA/SIPC. Advisory services through Mission Hills Financial. Mission Hills Financial and United Planners are not affiliated

**LAW OFFICES OF SUSAN L. HARTMAN**  
YOUR **DUI** Defense Attorney

**CALL FOR FREE CONSULT 619.260.1122**

**2023 BEST OF UPTOWN SAN DIEGO**  
Serving: San Diego • Orange County • Riverside • Imperial Valley • Los Angeles



Fresh Summer Raspberry Crepes

**520 FRONT STREET**  
(Just South of Market)  
**DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO**  
(619) 231-7777  
6:30AM - 2:30 PM  
EVERY DAY  
BREAKFAST & LUNCH  
[richardwalkers.com](http://richardwalkers.com)

**RICHARD WALKER'S**  
Pancake House

# Vast 'pastabilities' and an amusing cheese wheel

## Restaurant Review

By FRANK SABATINI JR.



It was four years ago in early February when a trio of Sicilian transplants opened their warmly appointed RustiCucina restaurant on Park Boulevard. Only a short time later, however, Covid hit and the public would have to wait a while before enjoying the full experience at the much-anticipated newcomer.

The double-storefront space was previously home to Pardon My French, and Heat Bar & Kitchen before that. It's a prime piece of property that comes with an inviting bar and outdoor patio.

A friend and I walked into a nearly full house on a recent weeknight. The atmosphere was convivial. Seated cozily between two other tables along a banquette, we arrived ravenous for pasta and wine.

A couple glasses of the latter was love at first sip—a house blend of Cabernet and Chianti. Smooth, easy and juicy it was.

The culinary slant here claims to focus on the merging of American and Sicilian cooking

styles. At some points throughout our meal we made the connection. At other times we didn't.

Vibrant marinara sauce cloaking an appetizer of three sizable meatballs made of beef and pork was stamped with classic Sicilian flair. The balls themselves were much denser than I prefer, but with trusty flavor thanks in part to drizzles of tangy "Parmesan fondue" on top.

Our second appetizer was an attractive plate of Sicilian artichoke hearts attached to their long stems for easy handling. They were delectable on their own minus the pond of lemon-garlic sauce in which they were served. We couldn't detect the citrus or the garlic in the sauce no matter how hard we tried. With such beautiful chokes at hand, I fantasized about how they would have tasted simply grilled, with just a spritz of fresh lemon to boot.

A wheel of imported Parmesan cheese weighing at least 80 pounds comes into play for the daily pasta special. On this night, it was house-made rigatoni in white-wine cream sauce and with crumbled Calabrian sausage strewn throughout.

The wheel is partly hollowed out to create a bowl shape in the

### RUSTICUCINA

3797 Park Blvd., Hillcrest

619-310-5291,  
www.rusticucina.com

Prices: Appetizers, soups and salads, \$10 to \$20; build your own pasta, \$21 to \$28; cheese wheel pasta (changes daily), market price; entrees, \$24 to \$39.

center. It's carted to your table and blow-torched for a minute until the middle and sides become melty. Then, the already-prepared pasta dish parked alongside gets dropped into the wheel for a vigorous swirling.

We loved the presentation. Everyone does. The pasta successfully picked up the cheesiness from the wheel, thus adding unforeseen heft to the rigatoni, which was already cloaked in cream sauce and oil from the sausage.

The dish was impossible to finish as our waitress pointed out later that most of the cheese-wheel specials are made with cream sauces (more typically found in northern Italy than Sicily) and that many customers split the orders and augment them with a lighter dish or salad.



RustiCucina's warmly appointed dining room (Photos by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

With better foresight, I would have chosen differently when crafting our second entree from the fun "build-your-own-pasta" section of the menu. In doing so, you first select a cut of pasta from about seven choices and then pair it to one of five different sauces. I chose spaghetti with carbonara sauce, which hails from Italy's west-central Lazio region, a considerable distance from Sicily.

The fully cooked spaghetti had the faintest chew, exactly how I like it. And the carbonara was classic with its blend of egg yolk,

pecorino cheese and rendered fat from guanciale (pork cheek). Thankfully the kitchen omits the cream, which is often used in Americanized versions. Needless to say, this too was a heavy dish, although expected, as it contained generous pieces of the pork, not to mention a better depth of flavor compared to our rigatoni entree.

Outside of RustiCucina's numerous pasta choices, the menu extends to dishes such as lamb ossobuco; braised short ribs with Parmesan-mushroom risotto; lobster ravioli; lasagna bolognese; and more.

For dessert, outsourced limoncello cake layered with mascarpone cheese took the lead for us over tiramisu, crème brulee, cannoli and chocolate lava cake. I've had this exact cake before and adore its fluffiness and tang—and bits of lemon peel hiding within. It was the perfect palate cleanser after our ultra-caloric dinner.



An appetizer of three meatballs



Spaghetti carbonara



Sicilian artichoke hearts



Rigatoni tossed in the cheese wheel



**WE ARE BACK AND BOOMING!**  
**PICK-UP & DELIVERY AVAILABLE**

**Kings Inn San Diego**  
Hospitality at its best. Where all our guests are equal!!!

Centrally Located and One Mile to Hillcrest, Newly Remodeled Rooms, Heated Pool and Jacuzzi, Fitness Room, Wedding and Event Spaces, Pet Friendly

**The Waffle Spot**  
Home of San Diego's Best Waffles

**The Amigo Spot**  
Family Style Mexican Restaurant

Home to The Waffle Spot Diner and The Amigo Spot Restaurant and Bar

1333 Hotel Circle South  
619.297.2231  
Located at the Kings Inn  
www.KingsInn.com

**GOLD MEDALLION AWARD – 2006, 2007 & 2009**  
San Diego Restaurant Association

**20% OFF ENTIRE CHECK**  
(on food only) Maximum Value \$25 Gratuity not included. Present coupon before ordering. Dine-in only. Cannot be combined with any other offers. Not valid on holidays. One coupon per table. Expires 2/29/24.

Thank You for your continued support for the past 23 years!

**TASTE OF THAI**  
Authentic Thai & Vegetarian Cuisine

Hillcrest – 527 University Ave | (619) 291-7525  
Del Mar – 15770 San Andres Dr. | (858) 793-9695

[www.tasteofthaisandiego.com](http://www.tasteofthaisandiego.com)