



THAT PHILLY STYLE *Italian fare just tip of the pasta*

By Grace Bascos

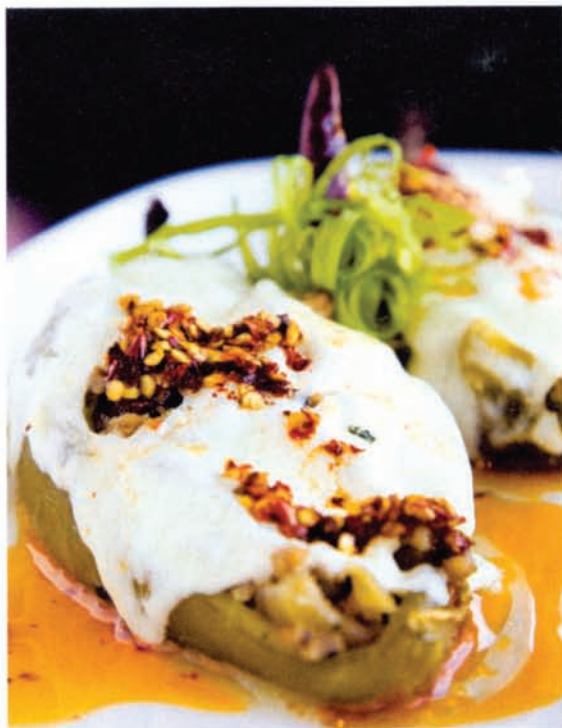
Tucked away in a corner of the Rio, Cafe Martorano is proud to serve its food its own way. Originally, chef Steve Martorano's menu said on the bottom: "This is the way I cook. Please enjoy and don't break balls!" We got the message loud and clear: Martorano's style of cuisine is what separates him from the rest. Constantly reinventing himself and his restaurants, Martorano celebrates 15 years in business.

Gangster movies and club music used to blast nightly, often with Martorano himself behind the decks. But today this is a kinder, gentler Cafe Martorano, one where soul hits and the sounds of his hometown, Philadelphia, fill the air, and fashion runways play on the screens. Pink hues emerge from the ceiling above

the bar, and the dining room, feeling vaguely Miami clublike, has a great view of the open kitchen.

The menu is broken up as if it is a show program, calling the entire collection of dishes "The Movie." Appetizers, of course, are Part I. His meatball (yes, singular) is considered by some as the best in the world. Now, not having sampled all the meatballs in the world, we happily call this one of our top three. Baseball-size and served with marinara and salad, it's a great entry into Martorano's proud South Philly-Italian fare. Anaheim peppers stuffed with veal and fresh mozzarella are an interesting take on chili rellenos, with the mellow chilies adding a subtle kick to the mild veal and cheese.

**Cafe
Martorano
Las Vegas**
Rio,
6-10:30
p.m. daily.
702.777.7740



Part II features the pasta courses, and a fresh pot of water with Sicilian sea salt is boiled for every order, and pasta is always cooked to perfect al dente. Orecchiette, an ear-shaped pasta, with hot and sweet sausage, is homey and earthy. The addition of beans adds a pleasant creaminess to the dish. Bucatini carbonara is another homestyle winner, made with pancetta, egg and heavy cream.

Entrées can, of course, be found under Part III, and you must save room for this course. The grilled pork chop is served with hot cherry peppers, roasted cipollini onions and polenta. Osso buco is one of those dishes that has so much potential, but more often than not, can be disappointing. Martorano's passes with flying colors: fork-tender veal shank is well-seasoned, balanced with the addition of capers to the sauce. And whatever you do, don't miss the wonderful roasted marrow from the bone.

If it has been awhile since you've been to Cafe Martorano, now is the time to revisit. Steve Martorano's original caveat is conspicuously absent from the menu. Not that you'd ever want to break his balls about the food; done his way, there's no reason. **LVM**

