

# Living it up at La Lasagna

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

• DEBBIE LAMPERT

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In the competitive restaurant world, survival depends on keeping up with the trends. It is always interesting to revisit restaurants that have survived the years and to see the innovations that have kept them going.

La Lasagna, on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street, is celebrating 20 years as a kosher dairy restaurant in this location.

Owner Yosef made *aliyah* from Italy and brought to Israel what he knew best – Italian cooking. When we visited this restaurant shortly after it opened, it had a one-dish menu and seating at picnic tables. The product was good, the welcome sincere, and at the time there were few kosher restaurants in Tel Aviv.

How times have changed! This week, we revisited the restaurant to see how it has changed with them.

Every aspect of La Lasagna has improved. There are now individual tables with white tablecloths, set with long-stemmed wine glasses. The restaurant was renovated, and the seating area was expanded. The street-side seating is covered in the winter, but the wall of windows facing the street retains the Tel Aviv vibe.

La Lasagna continues to specialize in pasta and pizza dishes, but oh the choices. The menu features the Italian pasta, ravioli, gnocchi, fettuccini, salads, pizza with wafer-thin crust, and desserts that one would expect. All the main dishes are made in-house. In addition, Yosef has expanded the menu to include a large offering for special diets, such

as nondairy, vegan, gluten-free, and whole wheat dishes. These are all clearly marked on a colorful graphic menu available in Hebrew and English.

La Lasagna has found its niche in the culinary world of special diets. The Mehadrin Beit Yosef restaurant boasts the largest menu of gluten-free dishes of any kosher or non-kosher restaurant in Israel. The full-page gluten-free menu includes brochette made with gluten-free bread, a host of gluten-free pastas and gnocchi, and even gluten-free beer!

The word is out, and people come from far and wide for this menu. All the food is made in-house, under the strict supervision of Yosef, who keeps the gluten and the gluten-free kitchenware completely separate.

Yosef has innovated many new dishes that are available only at La Lasagna.

He proudly points out the Fettuccini Cacio Peppe (NIS 96), a specialty of Italian cuisine for expert chefs only. The sauce is a mix of pecorino and ground black peppercorns, and an exact amount of starchy water from the cooked pasta. This dish tests a chef's skills because if the proportions are not exactly right, the sauce will be lumpy.

Suppli (NIS 49) is a new appetizer of rice balls and mozzarella cheese, the Roman version of arancini.

New dishes are continually added to the repertoire, and specials of the day are listed on a blackboard.

We stopped for a late lunch at La Lasagna to check out the new face of this restaurant. Though Yosef was anxious to show off his new additions to the menu, we went with the tried-and-true

and shared the gluten-rich lasagna with mushrooms from the standard menu and a pasta dish from the gluten-free menu.

The lasagna (NIS 83) came to the table still bubbling from the oven. Layers of hand-made pasta, mozzarella, béchamel, Parmesan, and fresh mushrooms were baked in a creamy tomato sauce, crowned with a crusty brown top. The lasagna is a good size for one hungry diner, but it would be tight for two, though sharing this main dish would leave you wanting for a very worthy dessert.

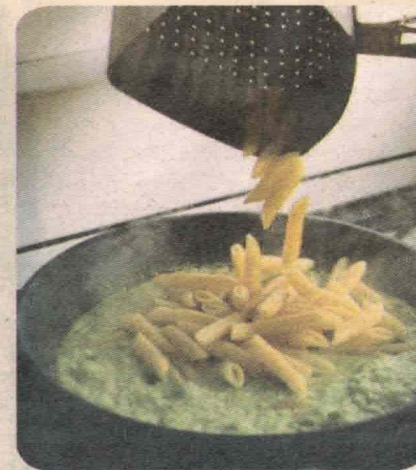
Not so the generous portion of gluten-free penne in rose sauce (NIS 75). The sauce, says the menu, is made with tomatoes, fresh garlic, and cream. We suspect that, like all good chefs, Yosef left out the secret ingredients from the description. The pasta was somewhat crunchy, and perhaps a bit more al dente than I am used to.

We agreed that there was no discernible difference in taste between the gluten-free pasta and the more familiar gluten-rich pasta. The secret, we figure, of both the lasagna and the pasta dish is the sauce, which was delicious even without the pasta.

We topped off our meal with a cup of strong coffee. After two filling main courses, we reluctantly passed on the dessert.

It is always fun to visit Tel Aviv and enjoy the upmarket shops, the bustle on the streets, and the mix of humanity.

In the restaurant, there was a large group of diners sharing a table piled high with huge salads, pizza, and lasagna. Our mouths were watering as we



(La Lasagna)

watched the dishes come out of the kitchen. In another corner was a middle-aged couple, smiling demurely at each other, exploring their first date. At another table, two gentlemen who had arrived on Korkinet scooters ordered only coffee and a luscious-looking panna cotta (also gluten-free). The cakes at La Lasagna are from Biscotti, but the panna cotta is all Yosef.

Whether you are on a restricted diet or not, you are sure to enjoy the delicious offerings at La Lasagna.

### La Lasagna

177 Dizengoff Street, Tel Aviv

Tel: (03) 523-0037

Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. After Shabbat until 11 p.m. Closed Friday and Shabbat.

Parking in the underground lot at 17 Arlozorov

Kashrut: Mehadrin Beit Yosef

*The writer was a guest of the restaurant. She is the founder and CEO of eLuna.com, the premier English-language website for kosher restaurants in Israel.*