

April 18 - May 1, 2007

# THE IMPROPER BOSTONIAN

## Bridal Guide

METRO BOSTON'S HAPPY, LOVING GUIDE TO ENTERTAINMENT, CULTURE AND WEDDED BLISS

TRENDS TITTLE-TATTLE PEOPLE PANACHE

## THE WORD



Clockwise from bottom-left: corzetti; Ligurian lemonade and vino francesca; the main dining room

### NEW IN TOWN

## Fettuccine, al Fresco

The South End's starving artists will soon find themselves in need of a new cliché. With the opening this month of an Italian eatery at 500 Harrison, hunger pangs should cease and desist once and for all. Brought to you by the Sapphire Group's Michela Larson, Gary Sullivan and Karen Haskell—the folks behind Blu and Noir (and the original Rialto)—Rocca represents a key moment in SoWa's transformation from urban squalor into the foodie haven condo brokers have been cooing about for years. As in, it's an actual restaurant. With food. Finally. Maybe those glossy brochures were onto something after all.

Rocca's proprietors collaborated with chef Tom Fosnot (formerly executive chef at Blu) to build a menu based on the food of Liguria, the hilly, coastal region in northern Italy that includes the Italian Riviera. Why Liguria? "I realized that [its cuisine] was underrepresented in this city," says Larson. "Also, that's where my mother was born." Then again, Ligurian grub is hardly a tough sell, centered on the likes of olives, pesto, wild mushrooms, seafood and "herbs, herbs, herbs," she says. Small plates, called "Tastes," include artichokes with garlic mayonnaise (\$6), wild-mushroom toasts with pecorino (\$5) and fritti di pesce (\$6), a tasty, deep-fried snack that transcends its all-too-mundane description as "fish sticks with salsa verde." Underpromise and overdeliver, indeed.

Slightly larger, appetizers continue the theme of simple, honest ingredients combined for maximum impact,

including veal-stuffed zucchini with tomato sauce (\$7) and marinated Maine sardines with radishes and mint (\$9). Cash-strapped artists should check out the spaghetti "poveri" (translation: "peasant," or "poor"), pasta tossed with tomato, lemon, pine nuts and green herbs (\$10). Other noodle choices include linguine levanto (\$16), with rock shrimp, ricotta and spring onion, and hand-rolled trofie (\$10) tossed with pesto, made with a traditional mortar and pestle. Entrées top out at \$24 and include burrida (\$19), a Ligurian fish stew served over toasted ciabatta, and grilled hanger steak with olive butter, roasted fingerling potatoes and grilled spring onion (\$24). For dessert, a house specialty is the warm, sweetened focaccia with a candied lemon (\$7). The 80-bottle wine list, almost exclusively Italian, and a full bar provide ample options for washing it all down.

Housed in a former factory, Rocca retains the quirky character of the original space, but a gut renovation has yielded a pristine décor that riffs on the theme of "mountains meeting the sea," with blues, browns and greys in flowing patterns, exposed brick and multiple levels joined by stairs that conjure Liguria's craggy landscape. The main room seats about 120, with another 40 spots at the huge, horseshoe-shaped bar. But the real draw, as the weather turns, may be the patio—a cluster of tables topped with yellow umbrellas, another coastal-Italian touch. Rocca Kitchen & Bar, 500 Harrison Ave., Boston (617-451-5151). —Jolyn Helterman

## LAST SCENE HERE

BY JONATHAN SOROFF

### AT LEAST THERE WASN'T A LINE FOR THE LADIES' ROOM...

The annual march of the penguins known as the **Men's Event** to benefit the **Fenway Community Health Center** took place at the **Westin Hotel** and, as always, attracted a largely gay, mostly male and almost uniformly good-looking crowd.

Present and accounted for: the evening's honoree, gazillionaire media mogul **Ron Ansin**, white-hot interior designer **Dennis Duffy** and his cochair, **Stephen Earheart**, restaurateur extraordinaire **Gary Sullivan**, New York drag diva **Shequida**, congressional widower **Dean Hara** (whose late hus-



At the Men's Event, top row: Dennis Duffy and Gary Sullivan;