

July 22, 2018

## **ETTA**

1840 W. North Ave.  
312-757-4444

2 diners @ 5:30 pm

cuisine: Italian hearth food: pizza, pastas, salads

opened: 7/16/18

chef: Danny Grant

owner: What If Syndicate (also Maple & Ash)

## **THE PLACE**

A funny thing happened on the way to dinner. We bumped into friends who were meeting friends for dinner at Etta, and we were invited to join the four of them. And that's what we did, and **that's how six people ended up around a very small café table.**

Very **casual-looking neighborhood spot with a neighborhood-looking crowd.** All ages, friends, families. Wood tables, cement floor, and a sound track with an almost-too-loud music track. Eclectic, percussion; all over the board. The center of the room was taken up by a huge **floor-to-ceiling arrangement of edible plants,** such as scallions and even artichokes. Adds to that farm-to-table feeling as stated at the bottom of the menu:

“We **source products from local farms** who love and respect quality as much as we do—kiss you farmer.”

## **HOSPITALITY and SERVICE**

Staff had already started this cramped table for four, and they **couldn't have been nicer** about squeezing in two more chairs and taking more orders. It all added to the fun of the serendipitous meeting.

In fact, when we joined the party, the group was polishing off a mushroom pizza. I was lucky to score one triangle.

## **THE MENU**

I spot a salad of heirloom tomatoes and stracciatella, reinforcing my recent musings that stracciatella is on the rise. It's kind of next-generation Burrata, which was next-generation mozzarella.

As most menus today, there are **more categories than necessary**, with anywhere from four to eight choices per category. Of course, **sharing is encouraged**.

## THE MEAL

### *Starters*

#### **Spicy meatballs \$10**

Sunday sauce, pecorino, hearth bread

A **zesty hearty little starter**. I can't recall if there were three or four meatballs but they were generous-sized balls, and the top of each one was singed—in a good way—and comfortably ensconced in red sauce. **Blistery flatbread triangles** shelter the meatballs. It feels as if you lifting the lid off a box that contains a wonderful gift. Good stuff.

### *Wood-fired pizzas*

#### **Wild mushroom \$19**

Spring onions, goat cheese, truffle, Raclette (cow's milk cheese from Switzerland)

In all fairness, I must point out that the pie I sampled arrived a good 10 minutes before we joined the table, and, as mention above, I got the last piece. **Delightful flavors on this Neapolitan style, blistered crust 'za, but the bottom was too soft.** My companions confirmed that the bottom was too soft from the get-go. **Lacked that prized chewy center,** the hallmark of the best of the style.

On the way out of Etta's, I gazed at and took in the aromas just-out-of-the-oven pizzas all over the place. Definitely made me **want to give Etta's pizzas another chance.**

### *Pasta*

#### **Farfalle pomodoro \$14**

Sungold tomatoes, basil, olive oil, Burrata

The **tomatoes make this dish**. They are sweet and melt into everything making for a cozy party in your mouth.

#### **Squid ink chitarra \$16**

Manila clams, king crab, nduja butter, crispy garlic

Of the two pasta dishes **this one has more spunk**. A delightfully al dente pasta plays nice with just-right clams, tender fresh crab, lively sausage nubbins, and kick-ass garlic tidbits.

## *Mains*

### **Wood-fired pastured chicken \$22**

Lemon, garlic, thyme, drippings, potato purée

A half-chicken on the bone. Reasonably juicy, redolent of thyme, overall tasty but straightforward. The “safe” dish.

## *Desserts \$8*

### **Aya’s chocolate sabayon tart**

Vanilla bean ice cream

Like the chicken. Pleasant and just what you expect.

### **Lavender roasted apricots & cream**

Raspberry

Oat crumble

Undoubtedly a seasonal concoction and the table fave. The lightest whipped cream ever. The crunchy crumble is a perfect foil for the soft and savory apricots and the soft and sweet peaches. Summery textural heaven.

## **THOUGHTS**

Etta is a 180°—in vibe, menu, and prices—from Maple & Ash. This caught me by surprise: I thought this group would go overboard in creating its version of neighborhood comfort. The truth is this restaurant team may have meticulously created neighborhood comfort, but everything about the place feels organic and welcoming—not manufactured. The real deal. Even the intensely popular bar.