

A dinner at the top



By Michael Philippi
Ungaretti & Harris • Restaurant Critic

So someone suggested that I quit using this space to write about places I love and instead check out places I don't know and see if they are any good. You know, like a restaurant critic.

I had heard a lot about Roof, which is the rooftop restaurant at the Wit Hotel, the new, hip hotel that opened last year. I approached it with an open mind, but secretly I expected it to be everything I can't stand in a place — it is ultra-trendy, the new darling of the black leather and chrome crowd — it has cute names for things, like the menu (EAT) or the drink list (DRINK).

I was looking for STAND or SIT when it came time to find the restrooms. So I went there, and the food is okay and the service is spotty, but none of that mattered because it is an amazingly special venue.

There is some very nice indoor space with great views, but if it's not raining or snowing, the action is outside. In keeping with the descriptive naming rights, ROOF should really be called FIRE because now that it's chilly, the outdoor space has a million heat lamps that warm up the perimeter tables.

The eye-catchers are two long, communal, bar-like tables placed end to end with a little space in between. A gas fire runs down the center of each table. There is glass over the actual flames — so, sadly, there is no future in hanging out to see if any drunken frat boys will walk the hot coals — but it is warm, cozy, and very, very cool.

Plus, the place overlooks our beautiful city and is as smart and urban a setting for a drink and food as I have seen.

The food is a selection of small plates — some are pretty good, some are pretty ordinary. The best were the grilled lamb burgers. Three to an order, they are served with minted

cucumber — more mint than cucumber and a little tomato-based “marmalata,” as printed on Roof's menu.

Also on the pretty good list is the herbed sheep's milk ricotta, which is hearty grill-marked toast with a peppery smooth cheese spread.

Like all good bars, Roof has fried mozzarella. But better than most, Roof's ball-shaped fried mozzarella is crunchy on the outside and uses a better grade of cheese.

As a fan of cured encased meats, “Tasting of Salumi” is always on my must-try list. But because I tried it, you don't have to. Paper-thin slices of what may have once been good, hearty pieces of salami were so thin that they dried out by the time they made it to the table.

The marinated olives were good and priced right at \$5 a bowl. The big green, brown and black olives were very good bar-table food, not too salty. Like a lot of places, Roof also serves smallish flatbread-style pizzas. I tried the truffle one, which was good, but a little stingy on the truffles.

Sliders are getting to be a popular bar food. Roof serves up parmesan chicken sliders — served like the lamb burgers — good and plenty for the price, but nothing that you had to go to the top of a building to find. The fries, however, are worth the trip: a big, heaping basket of skin-on, salty fries with ketchup and pesto aioli for dipping. Perfect to go along with the great selection of ice-cold beers.

Bonus points for Roof: when all is said and done, it's a really good hotel bar, which means giant flat-screen TVs for watching the game and a pretty good mix of locals and travelers. And the über cool people don't come out until late night, so they can be avoided.

Lagniappe: Cibomatto, the second-floor restaurant in the Wit is a great place for a client

lunch or dinner. Sleek and modern like its rooftop cousin, it offers the privacy of high-backed booths and an incredible ceiling photograph mural.

The food is foodie Italian — really good, but probably not like Mama made, unless Mama was named Spazzio. The space is beautiful, the salads crisp and fresh, and the paninis delicious. The whitefish was a nice lunch dish — beautifully presented with watercress and parsley and paired with a mild but flavorful sauce. Dessert included panna cotta laticello, which must be Italian for fresh citrus fruits on short bread with mint and crusted creme brulee. Whatever it's called, try it.

Travelers Tip — There are two kinds of restaurants in New York: great and closed. Thankfully, Buon' Amici is in the great category. This tiny (10 tables) family-run joint in lower Manhattan (40 Peck Slip) isn't a place that the concierge is going to tell you about. Everything is homemade, from the pasta to the cannoli. The seafood is as fresh as it gets, and osso buco is fall-off-the-bone delicious. You will need to use all your fresh crusty bread to sop up every bit. Buon' Amici is right around the corner from the Seaport and Pier 10, and a great part of Manhattan for us flatlanders. Get out of midtown and check out this place, which puts food and friendliness way ahead of trend and fashion — although does great marinara ever really go out of style? ■

Pleadings:


Roof (the Wit Hotel)
201 N. State St.

(312) 239-9501

Court costs:

Appetizers: \$6-\$16

Entrees: \$7-\$16

Verdict: 

mphilippi@uhlaw.com