

Italian cuisine? It's simple

The Landmark's uncomplicated Italian (and other) cuisine, live music and stunning views

By Niki Price
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It's been five and a half years since Marilyn Ciafone, an Italian-American from Long Island, New York, first took over the kitchen at the Landmark Restaurant. The first order of business, she recalls, was to eliminate the favorite crutch of the uninspired cook: "And cheese."

Every recipe she encountered seemed to end the same way: "And cheese." The dishes, with overwrought, too-spicy sauces and covered with a thick layer of cheese, bore little relation to the straightforward, delicious, even healthy Italian cooking that she grew up with.

"In real Italian cooking, you want to taste each of the



Marilyn Ciafone and Bruce Olson, the owners of the Landmark Restaurant and Lounge, take a break in the corner table. At right, a bowl of Five-Cheese Ravioli that even looks good to the resident seagull. OCT photos by Niki Price.

ingredients: the tomatoes, the basil, whatever it is. You don't want to obliterate everything with all that cheese. Italian cooking is straight on, and you can tell the difference," Marilyn said. "It's uncomplicated."

So she set to work, clearing out the heavy sauces, pre-packaged mixes and frozen portions, and created a menu of fresh, simple Italian cuisine served along with a beachy selection of seafood, salads, chowder and sandwiches. Whatever the Landmark kitchen prepares, she said, is made with care and simplicity, using authentic fresh ingredients.

"Even the way we approach our fish is Italian. I only order a certain amount each day, because I always want to be really fresh. And we don't smother the fish in sauce. It's just delicious fresh fish, right off the grill," she said.

One of the Landmark's most popular items is the

Fisherman's Pasta, which is cooked in a light tomato sauce flavored with herbs and wine, and tossed with shrimp, crab, cod or salmon. Seafoodies swoon, too, over the Cioppino, a bowl full of Dungeness crab, bay shrimp, cod, salmon and halibut simmered in a spicy tomato broth with wine and herbs. Other Ciafone family recipes include the Mushroom Pasta, Shrimp Scampi, Five-Cheese Ravioli, Chicken Parmesan and Baked Ziti, all served with garlic bread and salad. Diners can even say "buongiorno" at breakfast by ordering Pomodoro Italiano, which features baked eggs and tomatoes cooked in olive oil.

"There are lots more dishes that I could present, but I think that people are still getting used to the idea that there's a really good Italian restaurant outside of Portland," Marilyn said. "I don't want to make it too fancy. I'm trying to keep it to things that people will recognize, and do fewer things well."

Bruce Olson, Marilyn's husband and co-owner of the Landmark, was raised in Washington state but also lived in New York City for many years. They both miss a favorite Greenwich Village treat: cannoli, the tube-shaped shells of fried pastry dough, filled with a sweet, creamy filling. Now, thanks to a new vendor, they're able to serve cannoli that are "the real Italian cannolis, and they're delicious. They're the right size, they have the right look, they're just right," Marilyn said. "We found this company, a small bakery that has recently expanded, and they have beautiful Italian cannolis, just like we would get in Greenwich Village. They're just gorgeous."

Cannoli fans might not need to read on, but the Landmark does offer other amenities. Their fish and chips plates present lightly-battered fresh cod, halibut or salmon, fried in canola oil and served with French fries and homemade coleslaw. They keep their visitors happy with other seaside favorites, from steamer clams and crab cakes to a kids' menu, with corn dogs and spaghetti. Sandwiches, such as the Yachats Rounder (with Italian meatballs) and the Pesto Sandwich (with fresh mozzarella and homemade pesto), are served on fresh, crusty French baguettes.

As hard as Marilyn has worked, however, some people may not remember her cuisine at all — they're usually transfixed by the view. Every table in the restaurant has a full view of the estuary, where the Yachats River meets the wide Pacific, and its resident sea otters, gulls, eagles, people and pets.

"People come here in the winter just to watch the storms, because when you're sitting in our dining room, you're hanging over the cliff. It feels like you're on a ship. You can watch these huge trees rolling down the ocean and pushing back, and the seals and animals scur-



rying around, and the wind," Marilyn said. "I think it's one of the top scenic spots on the coast. It's constantly changing."

Then again, so is the music schedule next door, at the Landmark Lounge. Bruce, a former music journalist and lifelong blues devotee, books intriguing acts from around the country. He offers an overnight stay at the view apartment upstairs, a few hearty Italian meals and a

music-loving audience that few musicians expect from such a tiny town; as a result, the Landmark has hosted national touring acts like zydeco phenomenon Curley Taylor, blues guitarist Terry Evans and gypsy punk rockers Luminescent Orchestrii. Thanksgiving offerings include Vibe Nation, a band that calls its music "evolutionary reggae."

Business has been good at the Landmark, Bruce said, because the cuisine has fed the interest in the music. And vice versa.



"Some people started to come here for the food, and saw the band posters on the wall. And others would come for the music and order off the late night menu, and discover our food. We've seen a synergetic relationship between the two sides of the business," he said. "The word has gotten out in Eugene, and it seems like lots of people are coming over to make a weekend of it. They're getting a motel, coming to the Landmark for dinner, and then moving into the lounge at 9 p.m. for the show. Then, they come back the next day for breakfast."

According to Marilyn, the food is good because the kitchen staff — and even the owners — are happy.

"It's really important to have a happy kitchen, especially with Italian cooking. It has to be presented with love. If you're not happy, it shows in the cooking."

And, cheese.

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The Landmark Restaurant, 111 Hwy. 101 in Yachats, is open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday. The kitchen at the Landmark Lounge offers a late night menu until 1:15 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. To learn more, call the restaurant, 541-547-3215, or the lounge, 541-547-5459.

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