



## Fast-casual Italian joint Spoleto Italian Kitchen gratifies the college crowd

By Faiyaz Kara @faiyazkara

A drive out to the Plaza on University convinced me that college kids have it pretty good nowadays. The gleaming new student housing complex stands proudly on the corner of University Boulevard and Alafaya Trail, with nary a whiff of cheap weed, mildewed unmentionables or inebriated circus animals greeting one's nostrils. The aberrance is further compounded by 63,000 square feet of retail space, much of it occupied by restaurants in which you or I might actually be caught dead. Not that I'd want to spend my last day at Spoleto Italian Kitchen – that would be about as bizarre a death wish as ... oh ... Charles Bronson's *Death Wish V: The Face of Death*, which currently holds a zero-percent rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

Now, rotten tomatoes don't enter the picture at this Brazilian-based fast-casual Italian joint, and that's how it should be. Like most eateries in the genre, choice is king. Guests select a carb (or greens), choose some toppings, add an upgrade, pick a sauce, then dress it up. I'll admit, the sensory overload caused a brain-fart of sorts, but I wasn't the only one. Selecting the carb was easy enough – "spaghetti!" – but that's when I got a bit lost. The nice girl behind the counter asked what "base" I preferred – pesto, garlic or olive oil. "Uhh, olive oil," said I, at which she splashed some EVOO into a frying pan. Then she said to choose six ingredients for my pasta, but the pasta was nowhere to be seen. I didn't really want much else in my pasta, but nevertheless found myself pointing to fresh tomatoes, truffle-roasted mushrooms, peas, capers and pine nuts. "One more," she said, patiently awaiting my final choice. When I said I didn't want anything else, she paused for an incredulous nanosecond, then handed the frying pan to another nice girl. She was in charge of putting the parboiled pasta into the pan and quick-firing it, along with my sauce of choice – in this case it was brodo di pollo (chicken broth). My upgrade – polpetta grande (aka fat meatballs) – was thrown into the wood-fired oven, given a toss in bolognese, and handed to me as a side, which was my preference. I didn't want the meatball lolling about in noodles cooked in chicken broth, so I thank them for providing me with a sense of the "culinary freedom" comprising so much of the restaurant's marketing and advertising collateral.



**SPOLETO ITALIAN KITCHEN**  
12101 University Blvd. | 407-  
658-0593|[spoletoitalian.com](http://spoletoitalian.com)||\$\$

Naturally, that freedom comes with a price – \$8, to be exact – with upgrades like the \$3.50 meatball being extra. Said orb was dry, yet nicely seasoned; the noodles, not as al dente as I hoped, but the chicken broth and fresh ingredients meshed well.



One of my guests ordered the gnocchi (\$9), a "specialty pasta," with eggplant, squash, sundried tomato and green olives tossed in marinara. Apart from the gnocchi being way overcooked, it was a flavorful dish. Another guest reveled in perfectly cooked cavatappi (the "seasonal" pasta) with pesto and, yes, six ingredients. If you don't want pasta, the focaccia flatbread fashioned from house-made dough with the sauces/topping/upgrades of your choice is quite nice as well. Said flatbread is also the base for a simple ending of Nutella with strawberries (\$5), though you can never go wrong with imported millefoglie (\$1) or assorted Italian cookies. Coffee isn't served here, so we headed to Vespr Coffeabar (another popular UCF-area hang) for a proper post-meal brew.

Like I said, college kids have it pretty good nowadays.

[fkara@orlandoweekly.com](mailto:fkara@orlandoweekly.com)