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village east
 GUERNSEY

The name means 'taste' in Italian and there was plenty of that - and so much more - at Gusto, reports **Rosie Allsopp**

A taste of Gusto

'COME for dinner' said the boss, and who was I to refuse? Especially when the restaurant is Guernsey's newest and possibly most chic.

And so it was that myself, Di, 'office mum' Yvonne and former colleague Claire went to Gusto on Smith Street. It's on the site of the old Creperie but has been totally transformed by its new owners.

Opening the door of Gusto is a like stepping through a portal into Italy, with its freshly painted white walls splashed with vibrant tomato frescoes, and a menu that transports you from Smith Street on a rainy autumn evening to a sun-drenched, lemon-scented ristorante.

It's compact - only around 24 covers - but the tables are set out in such a way that it feels spacious.

It is lit with beautiful looping tungsten light bulbs and there is a lovely, welcoming ambience about the place.

Our hosts were manager Sabino, who originally hails from Naples, and Ilenia, from Sardinia. In the kitchen was Sabino's brother, kitchen magician Peppe.

Sabino told us that most of the dishes on the menu are from the Napoli region and where they can, they bring over produce from there to ensure the taste is truly authentic. 'We do everything fresh and we want people when they come



Gusto has been totally transformed by its owners. (19266659)

to feel at home, like in Italy,' he said. The menu is concise, with around eight choices each of antipasti, pasta and risotto

dishes, meat and fish, sides and desserts. There's also a daily chef's special. To begin, Di chose calamari with chilli and garlic, Yvonne

went for the Peppe fritto misto, Claire chose aubergine parmigiana and I went for polipetti Luciana, baby octopus. The starters were presented



Calamari with chilli and garlic.



Culinary 'fireworks' - Yvonne's amazing cannolo.



Fillet steak in red wine sauce with crispy pancetta.



Crab Linguine.

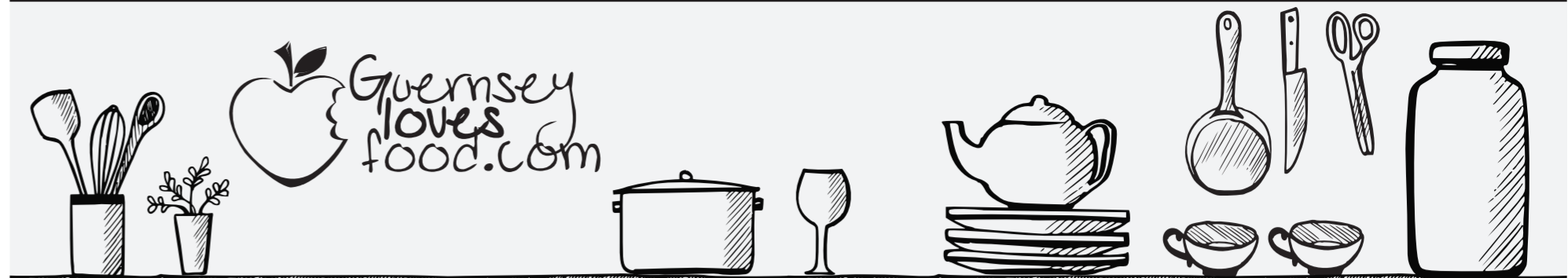
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Pepe, left, and Sabino Rega. (Picture by Peter Frankland, 19267027)

without fuss in clean white dishes, simply garnished with lemon and flecks of deep green parsley. Unpretentious and utterly divine to look at. Eagerly, we dug in. Di's calamari was properly tender with a pleasing hit of chilli at the end and the portion size was just right, not too big, so it wouldn't spoil her main course.

Yvonne's fritto misto was made with 'small, but perfectly formed, just as it should be' whitebait, prawns and calamari, dipped in the lightest of batters which didn't overpower the flavour of the fish.



Deputy features editor Rosie Allsopp, left, and features editor Di Digard. (19266663)

The aubergine parmigiana's tomato sauce was fresh, Claire said, and the thinly sliced aubergine had been griddled, lending it a beautiful smoky flavour and a perfect texture. I absolutely love octopus but it's not something you find on many menus, so this was an opportunity not to be missed. Chef Peppe did not disappoint. The polipetti came in a cute little white-lidded pot, and a fantastic aroma rose as I lifted the lid. They were delicious. Tasty, tender baby octopi, served whole in a tomato sauce flavoured with garlic and parsley.

As our entrée dishes were cleared there was much anticipation for what was next. Di chose linguini with crab

'perfect', she said. 'The fish was lightly cooked, sweet and full of flavour. There were clams and mussels and cherry tomatoes really lifted the pasta sauce.'

I went for the chef's special, grigliata del giorno, lightly grilled sea bass, brill, king prawns and scallops, served simply with olive oil and lemon and a delicate side salad. The grilled fish was treated with the lightest of touches, which made for a succulent, perfectly seasoned dish. The quality of the ingredients sang out.

Accompanying the main course we went for zucchini fritti and agreed that the deep-fried courgette was the best we'd ever tasted: crispy on the outside, succulent inside, and without a trace of oil. We greedily ate them while still slightly too hot, but all the more delicious for it.

We also shared a bowl of homemade fries, just simply cooked and seasoned potatoes, skin on, which were a million miles away from the usual. Real chips, real flavour. Bliss. Two courses under our (by now rather expanded) belts and we were in no doubt that the food at Gusto is of a very high standard, but we didn't yet know that the best was to come. Pudding. Or 'dolce' if we're being authentic. After some quibbling over

who was having what - I shamelessly bagged the profiteroles without delay - Di went for deconstructed Baileys cheesecake, Yvonne chose Sicilian cannolo and Claire decided on tiramisu. 'I've never had cannolo before, so I don't know how it's supposed to taste,' said Yvonne. 'But it was a firework finale. Light, crispy shell, cream, chocolate, exploding in my mouth.'

More sparks flew when Claire likened her tiramisu to an erupting volcano - 'lightly creamy and nicely soured with booze'.

And this from a [driving] woman who'd laid off the crisp Soave the rest of us had dived into.

The deconstructed cheesecake was a revelation. 'Incredibly light,' Di said, dusting it off. 'Whoever is in charge of dolce has the lightest of touches.' Ditto my profiteroles. The plate looked like Christmas: five chocolate-coated spheres, dusted with icing sugar. The choux pastry was the lightest I've ever had. Ever.

If you like real Italian food, cooked with love and served by people who enjoy what they do, and want you to love it too, Gusto is a go-to. Make sure you book, though, because word is getting round. It won't be long before you need to form an orderly queue.



The name says it all.



Fritto misto.



Grigliata del giorno.



Aubergine parmigiana.



Seafood spaghetti.



Pepe Rega. (Picture by Peter Frankland, 19267066)

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