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## Restaurants we love: Modern Restaurant and Lounge, New Rochelle

Feb. 1, 2014



For anyone who had dined at Modern's old location — a humble pizza joint with a beloved old brick oven, a hodgepodge of tables and deliveries racing through the front — this new locale, now a year old, is a feast for the eyes.

A former car dealership, the restaurant is like a classy grande dame resplendent with brassy eye-catching fixtures, snazzy semicircular banquettes, giant arched windows, a vaulted ceiling, and a handsome bar with a see-through wine cellar. And though this lady has painted herself up and added a sophisticated air, she remains at heart a red-sauce establishment — a family business. There's just more space around the table.

The signature brick-oven pizzas — dark on the bottom, with an addictive crispy crust and a dizzying array of options and toppings — are served in individual or full sizes. And there's an expanded, almost diner-like menu: chicken, veal, seafood, steak, calzones and favorites like eggplant rollatini, sausage and peppers, and homemade soups.

Most entrees are accompanied by salad or pasta, and in some cases both. Portion control is definitely not on the menu.

### What we tried

**Pizza margherita:** We ordered it as an appetizer, and it was the ideal combination of crispy and chewy with nicely sliced tomatoes, fresh mozzarella and basil.

**Veal piccata:** Though the presentation was nothing fancy, the veal was nicely browned and full of the tangy, lemony flavor that makes it an ideal comfort dish.

Traditional pie: The tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese standby is cooked to a masterful, slightly puffy, char.

**Sole:** Two fillets are served atop garlicky sautéed spinach.

**Shrimp scampi:** A liberal dosing of garlicky butter and white wine brings lots of flavor and sizzle to this dish.

**Spaghetti:** The noodles were perfectly cooked, and splashed with a hearty helping of thick red sauce bursting with a slight hint of sweetness.

Penne alla vodka: A creamy sauce features onions and prosciutto and finishes with a slight spicy zest.

### Drinks and dessert

An extensive and balanced wine list with wines mainly from Italy and the U.S. . There are more than 20 wines by the glass, and bottle prices top out at about \$70 (only a handful are over \$100). For desserts, expect tiramisu, ricotta cheesecake and traditional layer cakes such as carrot and red velvet. We opted for the lemon mascarpone which, though heavy on the icing, paired well with our decaf cappuccinos. The molten chocolate lava cake, complete with vanilla ice cream, was very, very good. There are also gluten-free options.

### The scene

The restaurant accommodates all kinds of folks, from a gaggle of 20-somethings to older couples to families to after-hour office get-togethers. Round tables easily fit groups of eight and semicircular banquettes work well for five or six.

### The service

Well-thought-out and executed. Our waiter checked on our table more than a few times during the course of our evening, and our water glasses were constantly filled.

### Inside scoop

Anthony Russo, who runs the restaurant with his cousin Sebastian Aliberti, says that though they tripled their space, they have kept prices the same. A nice touch: a separate entrance in the rear of the restaurant for pizza pick-up and delivery, so diners are never bothered with takeout orders jostling through the dining room (the way it had been in the old location).

### What we will order next

Roasted Red Pepper Ravioli: a creamy, cheesy dish that's so pink in its presentation, it makes for a great Valentine's Day dish.

### Where to park

Free valet Friday and Saturday nights starting at 4:30 p.m. and on Sundays starting at 1 p.m. Metered parking on both sides of Huguenot Street. There is also a municipal lot on the corner of Huguenot and Center Avenue.

### What's nearby

Regal New Roc City with its 19 theaters, including IMAX, is not far away on LeCount Place. Reverol & Co. at 300 Huguenot St. has ever-changing exhibits featuring contemporary art. It's open from 4 to 9 pm Thursdays to Saturdays and from 5 to 8 p.m. Sundays, making it perfect for a pre- or after-dinner stroll.

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 Recommend

