



Restaurant review: Go Roma Italian Kitchen in Chicago

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You don't expect a place that looks like fast food to ask if you've ever been here before. That was the warm welcome we got at [Go Roma Italian Kitchen on State Street](#) when we visited on an early Sunday evening on our way to see Liza Minnelli at the Chicago Theater. As baby boomers, we wondered whether we'd feel comfortable in the corner quick Italian eatery--the answer is: yes, and so will just about anybody.

Why did the young lady behind the counter ask if I'd been before? Because she wanted to see if I knew about Go Roma's novel concept for serving great Italian food in a fast, casual atmosphere. When I said no, she explained it's not like typical fast food. The first clue is that you order at the counter, but you don't stand there waiting for the food. You take your order # and go relax at your table. They bring it to you when it's ready. Oh, yeah, you'll notice that at the counter you can order soft drinks, but you can also choose from a small but nice selection of wines and beers—definitely not fast food.

The next clue is the menu. Calamari? Baby field greens and balsamic vinaigrette as a choice for your side dish? No way that happens at fast food.

Wines are decent quality and include cabernet, chianti, chardonnay and Pinot Grigio. When they bring your glass of wine, it's served Italian style in juice glasses imprinted with their bright Go Roma logo. And at \$3.99 a glass, you can't beat the value.

The menu covers a lot of ground—from appetizers and salads to grilled panini, hand-stretched pizza-on-a-plank, mix-n-match pastas/sauces, and classic Italian dishes like Chicken Limone and Rigatoni Al Forno.

We started with a bowl of their signature tomato-basil soup. Good, simple soup made special with a touch of sour cream. The calamari appetizer we shared next was exceptional. Large tubes of octopus very lightly breaded and cooked to perfection and served with a dish of tasty marinara sauce for dipping. Happily there wasn't a hint of rubbery-ness because they'd avoided the cardinal sin against calamari—overcooking.

Next we shared the Pear Walnut Salad with grilled chicken strips—again, not remotely a fast food-type option. We tasted pears, walnuts, cranberries, and goat cheese on the baby greens, all tossed with a subtly flavored dressing—and thankfully just the right amount of it to gently coat the salad rather than drown it. We scraped every last bite of this salad up. And then came the delicious crispy-thin wheat-crust vegetable pizza the manager had recommended. Goat cheese, sun-dried tomatoes and fresh veggies. Mmm, mmm.

A couple of other items didn't quite come up to the standards of the starters and the pizza. The Marsala Chicken pasta had nice smoky chicken strips and sautéed sun-dried tomatoes, but the sauce was thin and seemed to have had a marsala flavoring added as an afterthought. The turkey panini was grilled nicely and the bread was good, but the overall experience lacked something. Fries, however, were nicely done—crispy potato straws flecked with a secret herb. Not greasy, but also not quite hot enough when served. They were good, though, even without ketchup—a telling test for me.

Prices are set so that you breathe a sigh of relief. Besides the great drink prices, a lot of the food items are below that magic \$7+ minimum price tag we see almost everywhere these days. They keep the prices low by adapting the best features from several dining styles while eliminating the cost of having individual servers. The result is “not less service, but instead Hospitality.”

The place had a fun and easygoing atmosphere. Fun place for a date or a family meal. Kids eat free on Sundays—one kid meal free for every adult. The way the place is laid out gives more of a feeling of comfort and privacy at tables than a typical wide-open fast-food space. Lighting is diffused—very important to softening the ambiance. Clearly the owners of Go Roma—all four of whom together have 100 years in the restaurant business—knew what they were doing when they designed this concept.

Convenient to downtown—a simple bus ride gets you to theaters and shopping.

The location we visited is one of several franchises throughout the Chicagoland area—all the rest in the suburbs. The general manager at this one has personal email on his business card, so it's a good bet that if you have some feedback, he'll be listening.

Go Roma caters to lots of downtown affairs—fees are a small percentage of the bill. So far, the State St. location delivers within a several-block walking distance, plus they have curbside pickup. Word is they're purchasing a big trike so they can deliver farther. This is definitely a place worth taking a bus to if you're going downtown. We took the Broadway bus from Lakeview, hopped off at Chestnut, then hopped back on to get to our theater date. Even though it rained it worked out perfectly—and we were happy, well-fed guests at 64-year-old Liza's performance that night.

If you live in the neighborhood, this could just become your “let's take a walk and eat out tonight” place.

From the north take the #36 Broadway bus to Chestnut or the Sheridan/LaSalle #151 to Pearson. Visit the [RTA Trip Planner](#) for more ideas.



Go Roma sports a cheerful casual atmosphere with classic touches in the food.

Go Roma Italian Kitchen

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