

## Go to Rukola for romance, lively interior and tasty Italian fare

By DAVID PELUCHETTE

After spending the afternoon at Hydropark chasing down jet skis, water skis, catapults and catamarans and being chased down myself by two killer dogs (no kidding) who forced me to take an unexpected dip into the Dnipro river, I had built up quite an appetite. With one week to go until my vacation there were a couple of restaurants on my list to try out (tough job). The hot afternoon sun at Hydropark had finally dried me off to a semi-respectable appearance, I pulled out my still soggy list of restaurants from my hip pocket and to my good fortune, the info for the new Kyiv restaurant Rukola was still there. In fact it was just a short walk from the Dnipro metro station. The floating oasis was like a siren calling out to me. Rukola is part of the exclusive Royal Card Group which includes places such as Nobu, Marche and Pa Ti Pa. Nestled along the riverbank the exterior is dominated by green colors which made it almost look like a huge lily pad. When I arrived the doorman politely opened the door for me and I was welcomed inside. A little self conscious about my appearance, it was good that they didn't have face control.

When it comes to Italian cuisine, I can be a bit of a snob. Being Italian-American and brought up on delights such as Grandma's spaghetti and meatballs, fresh Italian breads, my Auntie's eggplant parmesan, Italian pastries mmm... and a pizza joint on every corner serving it up by the slice, I was quite spoiled to say the least. Italian cuisine is so close to my heart, in fact, that it's only been in the last 2 or 3 years that I have ventured out again to Kyiv's Italian eateries. My first experience here with pizza was so traumatic (they put mayonnaise on my beloved pie) that I vowed never again. Boy what a difference a few years can make! I now have some regular spots to go to when I have the craving and that list is ever expanding.

What first strikes you about the place is the size with two outdoor verandas, high ceilings and it's colorful stylish interior. However, I had purposely chosen a table inside, because the sun at that time of day would have been beating on my back, besides the air condi-

tioning was such a relief after Hydropark. Sitting inside overlooking the veranda, enjoying the sun set, which had turned the river into a sheet of sparkling glass, I thought, too bad I was alone, it would have made for a romantic evening. Writing about food, I of course have to make a few notes about the interior, service, food and prices. However, I do notice an interesting phenomenon about the quality of service that takes place when I pull out the almighty pen and pad. This could be a good tip for our readers, next time bring a pad and pen with you and see what happens, it could keep restaurants on their toes.

I started with a cool Mojito (Hr 32, 175g) as an aperitif, it's fresh mint taste, bubbly club soda and rum was exactly what the doctor ordered to quench my thirst and I wasn't the only one. It seems that Mojitos are very popular this season as the bar was lined up full of them, waiting to be swiftly taken away. And why not? It was Hemingway's drink of choice during his Cuban years. No better cocktail for a hot summer's evening in my opinion.

Next I went for a mozzarella, tomato and basil salad (Hr 28). The thick slabs of mozzarella served between freshly sliced tomatoes with cut basil leaves went just right. I lightly sprinkled the olive oil and vinegar left on the side and added a little pepper as a dressing. The Soave Classico (Hr15 for 50g) a crisp Italian white which was presented chilled and complimented the salad well. Although not very Italian, fresh black and white bread was also served.

My waiter was an attentive one, but the hostesses were even more attentive. Or, at least, that's what it seemed like at first. The first hostess just walked up to my table and put a little note under the napkin holder. So, I automatically assumed of course that she was slipping me her telephone number. Then twenty minutes later another note appeared by yet another hostess, this one was left under my salt and pepper shakers. They were both cute too! I couldn't believe my luck, I thought, this place was better than 112 on a Friday night! Curiosity finally got the best of me and I had to have a look. Much to my dismay, however, they both just had the times of the next reservations for that table. Unfortunately, management had never

heard of a written or nowadays computerized seating plan where you can make such notations without disturbing guests. Geez, and I thought I was a popular guy! To give credit to my waiter, he did come up to my table, apologized and gave me a complimentary limoncello liquor digestif at the end of my meal. Not only that, but he also gave me one of those swank restaurant discount cards for that chain. Usually, you have to drop a few bucks at one of their places first! See what the power of a pad and pen can have!

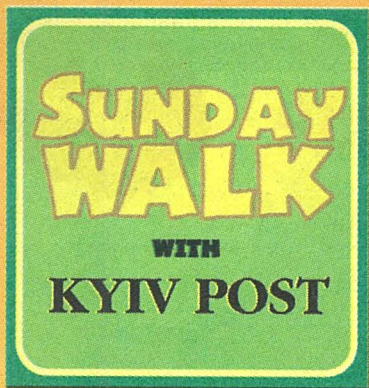
Now there were grilled meats sold per 100 grams and there were of course your standard Italian pastas and main dishes. This being my first visit, I always judge an Italian place for it's pizza, so I had the Margarita (Hr 28) – that wonderful creation, born in Naples and originally designed to represent the colors in the image of the Italian flag with the simple combination of tomato sauce, mozzarella and basil. In pizza, as in life, the pleasure is in the measure. The crust was thin and properly baked. It tasted as if it came out of a brick oven. The sauce was flavorful, but not overwhelming which only complimented the mozzarella topping. Although, the basil was not visible, which is standard in a Margarita, it was no less tasteful. I had chosen the Agulea Merlot (Hr13) for it's rich flavor. Red wine and pizza are a match made in heaven, unless of course you're at a sports bar serving pizza, then it's beer. The Merlot really brought out the flavor of the cheese.

To indulge my sweet tooth, I had the tiramisu (Hr 42) with a cappuccino (Hr 15). The thinly sliced Tiramisu was served slightly cold with a vanilla and chocolate sauce nicely decorating the sides. What impressed me most about the tiramisu was that it wasn't overflowing with bland cream as others I've had in the past. The cream was rich and finely layered. As I left, I thought to myself that Rukola was a wonderful place for a romantic evening by the river with that special someone, especially at sunset. Bellissimo!

**RUKOLA**  
Naberezhne shose, pier 6, 428-7219  
English speaking staff: No  
English menu: Yes



The newly opened Italian eatery Rukola offers worthy Italian food, decent service and a nice interior, which is both stylish and very casual. The place suits equally fine for a business lunch as for a romantic date. (Serhiy Zavalnyuk)



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