

Guytanno's may be tough to find, but it's worth seeking out

Dining Out

David Collins

Short of having a little sliding little peep hole on the front door and a secret password, it's hard to imagine how the new Guytanno's Café in Westery could have a much lower profile and still be a public restaurant.

Guytanno's opened this winter in an old office building at the rear of a Franklin Street shopping center, a dimly lit realm where you might expect to find only loading docks and dumpsters. It's the kind of place you don't stumble upon. You have to be looking for it.

And yet, people are finding their way here in a big way. When visiting on a recent weekend evening, we found the place bustling, with a 45-minute wait for a table and no seats in sight at the crowded bar.

We had called ahead, but they don't accept reservations. Clearly, they don't have to worry about it. As we settled in for a wait, we at least consoled ourselves with the thought that we seemed to have come to the right place. They must be doing more than few things right, we figured, to attract such a large crowd to an out-of-the-way corner of town.

In the end, the wait was much shorter than what we had been told, and we soon fell into the easy care of Guytanno's capable wait staff, a crew that seemed to

keep up remarkably well with the crush of a busy Friday night.

I should say that, despite the odd, almost industrial setting and the quite ordinary appearance on the outside, Guytanno's is quite charming on the inside, in a sparse and sort of minimalist way. It's basically black and white, white tile floors and white walls with bare wooden-topped tables and just some plain black metal sculpture on the walls.

The emphasis of the décor is the big open kitchen, separated from the dining room by only the long bar. You can see the kitchen, hear it, and smell it, especially the garlic, from the moment you walk in the front door. And why not emphasize the kitchen, since it's clearly what's making this new restaurant spin so fast.

The Guytanno's menu is straightforward and complete, if not vast. It is sort of café style, with an Italian influence, that ranges from the casual — sandwiches and salads — to the more complex — steaks, chicken, fish and pasta.

We started, as we browsed the menu, with an order of the grilled mussels, an evening special, that was an auspicious beginning: a dozen fresh spit mussels, sizzling from the broiler, with diced onion, peppers, and, naturally plenty of garlic.

The other simple appetizers menu includes jumbo shrimp with wasabi bisque, Mary cocktail sauce, 12 oysters or lump crab cakes with a lemon beurre blanc, \$9.95.

We were intrigued by and ordered, what the menu calls plum

tomato and prosciutto frazese, a term that seems also to elude Google, which asks if you don't mean frozen instead when you ask for a search. What we tasted was an interesting and tasty cousin to bruschetta, thin toast points with the tomato and prosciutto, topped with roasted garlic, red onion, basil and a smooth and surprisingly sweet gorgonzola marsala cream sauce.

This is the point at which we discovered that Guytanno's means business when it comes to portion size. No one is going to leave here hungry.

A bowl of the three onion-soup au gratin, \$3.25, for instance, was more like onion stew, a rich and dark and sweet brew of cooked onion and melting, complementary cheeses, all in a big heated crock.

We were less delighted with an order of fried calamari with hot peppers, \$7.95, not because we didn't appreciate the tender and juicy rings of calamari, but because they were too heavily breaded and on the soggy side, some of them sitting literally in a pool of heavy butter sauce. In general, we discovered, much of what comes out of Guytanno's kitchen is rich with oil or butter.

Sandwiches served at dinner include a robust Cajun spiced burger with apple bacon and port sauce, \$8.95, open faced steak sandwich, \$9.95, grilled veggie with fresh mushroom, \$6.95, or, most interesting, a lobster and avocado club on crusty Italian bread.

Pastas include a couple of chicken and seafoods. We liked the sound of the sweet Italian

sausage with marinated broccoli rabe and hot vinegar peppers in a spicy tomato sauce over linguini, \$14.95, or the lobster with plum tomatoes and scallions over fettuccine, \$18.95.

From the selection of main entrees, we hit the highlights, starting with the stouter chicken, breast with the wing, which on the day we visited came with a gruyere and prosciutto cream sauce. This was an exceptionally moist and tender piece of chicken, full of the delicate flavor of the cheese. It was served with green beans and carrot, cooked perfectly al dente, almost crispy but buttered with a too heavy hand.

An order of tuna was perfect, beautifully cooked with a macadamia crust and lightly sauced with a sweet pineapple wasabi teriyaki sauce. A serving of noodles and veggies made this a big plate of food, but one of the lighter selections of the evening.

Finally, we enjoyed a grilled New York sirloin, tender, cooked perfectly, with a smooth, also sweet gorgonzola and port wine cream sauce.

Deserts, if you can imagine finding room, include a lot of the usuals — tiramisu, a chocolate bomb, cheesecake and peanut butter pie. We tried and very much enjoyed the Guytanno's-made Italian rum cake, moist and rich and topped with fresh fruit frosting.

Guytanno's is hard to find, but easy to love, lively, interesting and reasonably priced. Just look for all the people coming out with doggy bags.



62 Franklin St.
Westery, N.J.
(401) 348-6221

Atmosphere: The interior is sparsely decorated but pleasant, and an open kitchen dominates the entire restaurant. You can sit at the bar and watch all the action, or, in the dining room, you can hear it and smell a lot of the good things in the pipeline.

Cuisine: Contemporary Italian, café-style menu, with an interesting assortment of fish, grilled meats, pastas, salads and sandwiches.

Service: A big, well-trained wait staff can handle a crowd with aplomb.

Price: Appetizers, from \$7.95 to \$9.95; Entrees from \$12.95 to \$17.95 and sandwiches from \$6.95 to \$11.95.

Hours: Fri. and Sat. from 4:30-10 p.m.; Mon.-Sat. lunch, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Wed. and Thurs. dinner, 4:30-9 p.m. Closed Sundays.

Credit cards: Major cards accepted

Reservations: Not accepted

Handicapped access: All on one floor.