

# FOOD & WINE

MICHAEL BAUER

Dining Out

## Evoking the spirit of West Marin

If someone asked me today if I'd like to drive from San Francisco to Point Reyes Station for a meal at Osteria Stellina, I'd start my engine before the question was punctuated.

Of course, it's a gorgeous drive, and just winding around the verdant hills, glimpsing the shimmering ocean feels like a Mediterranean vacation, but the food produced by owner Christian Caiazzo is the ultimate reward. This quiet West Marin town may be off the fine-dining radar, but Caiazzo's combinations have the same integrity and sensibility as what's served at restaurants such as Chez Panisse and Zuni Cafe.

Stellina is located on a main street that with very little fluffing could be a movie set for a Western. Having food this good in such a rustic, bucolic spot intensifies the pleasure.

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Lance Iversen / The Chronicle

Stellina's fava leaf salad includes Point Reyes blue cheese.

## Local products star at Stellina

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If I didn't see the Marin Organics sign in the window of this corner storefront, I might think it was a standard diner, with its practical tile floors, a utilitarian open kitchen and a crowded arrangement of tables in the 57-seat dining room. A closer look reveals more clues of what is in store: arrangements of fresh flowers, lemons, produce and herbs around the restaurant; glassware and flatware that speak of quality; and understated, comfortable molded leather chairs. It's clear that care has been taken to showcase the food.

Caiazzo developed a cult following at Toby's Coffee Bar across the street from his restaurant, and at the GBD grilled cheese stand at the local farmers' market. Anyone who can do a great grilled cheese is immediately in my good graces. It supersedes the fact that this chef has lots of cred — he's worked at places such as Cowgirl Creamery, Globe and Postrio.

The one-page menu reads homey, with such items as Beans and Greens (\$8), a mix of simmered gigante beans flavored with rosemary and garlic-braised chard, but it's prepared in such a way that you'd swear this was the first

### Osteria Stellina

11285 Hwy. 1 (at B Street), Point Reyes Station (415) 663-9988 or osteriastellina.com  
Lunch 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Wednesday-Monday. Beer and wine. Reservations and credit cards accepted. Easy street parking.

Overall: ★★★

Food: ★★★½

Service: ★★

Atmosphere: ★★

Prices: \$\$ (Moderate; most entrees \$17 or less.)

Noise rating: ★★★★★ Can only talk in raised voices (75-80 decibels)

Pluses: Exquisitely prepared Italian-inspired food using local products. Excellent pizza, appetizers such as beans and greens, and main courses such as braised goat shoulder. Don't miss desserts.

Minuses: The interior is pleasant but is much less inspiring than the food.

★★★★ Extraordinary  
★★★ Excellent  
★★ Good ★ Fair □ Poor

West Marin is rife with great products, so just about every item has a pedigree — for



Photos by Lance Iversen / The Chronicle

Stephen Grossberg and Jill Abrams, left, enjoy after-dinner coffee. An ice cream sandwich, above.

### The wine list

The one-page wine list, which features just 21 selections plus five sweet offerings, is best described as esoteric. Most people probably don't know much about 2007 Tu Tu Pinot Grigio (\$6 glass/\$13 carafe/\$24 bottle) or the 2006 Casaeda Syrah (\$9/\$19/\$36), for example.

Fortunately, Bryan Myers, the general manager, who created the list, is usually on the floor to answer questions.

Most wines are available by the glass or by the carafe, and most bottles are priced between \$28 and \$40.

If you bring your own wine, corkage is \$15.



Goat shoulder on rosemary-scented polenta and a fine wine.

I'd never seen fava leaves making up an entire salad (\$9), but Caiazzo piles them

and serves on rosemary-scented polenta glazed with natural juices and sprouting kale.

dishes that seem to have a permanent place on the daily changing menu, is mixed with

I didn't think I could face flourless chocolate cake (\$8) one more time, but Stellina's tastes new and fresh, a rich fudge bar with cacao nibs, whipped cream and caramel creme fraiche.

It takes passion and courage to serve this type of food in a remote area, where most chefs feel the need to offer hamburgers and fried calamari to survive. But Caiazzo seems to be winning over locals with impeccable quality and reasonable prices.

The staff is well trained and goes out of the way to make everyone feel at home. They also turn mistakes into opportunities to win over customers. One night we had to wait for our reservation, but general manager Bryan Myers insisted on giving us a taste of local Riesling. On another