

Marco Polo is solid Italian in Newport Beach
October 18th, 2007 · by Cynthia Furey
Orange County Register Food Frenzy, The Dining Blog



Marco Polo is a well-kept in terms of appearance: It's been a Newport Beach local favorite since it swung open its doors in 1990, but it still looks like a relatively new-ish, freshly opened eatery. This might work to the disadvantage of the restaurant, for it can easily be placed in the massive category of cookie-cutter Italian restaurants that we're unfortunately seeing all over the place.

Marco Polo's 17 years of making everything from scratch — from pasta to salad dressings — makes it a veteran in the Newport Beach restaurant scene, with a casual atmosphere, better-than-average wine list (for a casual place that offers take out) and a wood-burning oven hailing straight from Italy.

A **meat lasagna** (\$11.99, pictured above) is too hearty to eat in one sitting, but is lovely with the thicker-than-usual housemade noodles. I loved that the noodles stood up to the heavier ingredients and didn't get lost within each bite. The lasagna is extremely fresh, and each element is identifiable and separate, unlike a lot of the mushy lasagna dishes you sometimes come across elsewhere. The dish also impressed my Italian friend Heidi, who normally steers clear of restaurant lasagna because it is often just ho-hum average.

A **lobster ravioli** (\$14.29, at right) is equally as fresh, with a tart, chunky pomodoro that is a welcome change from the standard vodka-cream sauce that's always paired with lobster ravioli. It's bright and sunny— an inviting reminder of summer on these colder days.



Pizza Antica (\$9.79 for a small, pictured below) is your standard, pepperoni, mushroom and olive pie, so if you're going to order it, it might be better as an appetizer so you can try some of the restaurant's specialty dishes. Other entrees

recommended by regulars include the **Cioppino** (\$19.99) and the **Risotto Crema de Gamberi** (\$14.99) with shrimp in a tomato-cream sauce. Peculiarly, Marco Polo also serves a “**Thai Risotto**” (\$14.29), which is basically rice and chicken in a peanut sauce. It’s out of left field for sure, and if anyone’s tried it I’d love to hear about it.



Information: Marco Polo Italian Eatery, 1260 Bison Ave., Newport Beach. Dine in or take out. Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. 949-721-0801.