

Todd A. Price
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Restaurant Review: La Vita

EATS



DINING OUT

La Vita

In New Orleans, a neighborhood restaurant is often worth a trip across town. It's the funky joint that gets glossy press and attracts swarms of tourists who imagine themselves to be modern-day Christopher Columbuses discovering unknown lands of gumbo and fried seafood. In other towns, a neighborhood restaurant is mainly a place to eat.

La Vita, a new Italian place in Mid-City, is closer to how the rest of the country defines a neighborhood restaurant. It's casual enough that you can walk in without putting on your good shirt or even running a comb through your hair. The food is better than it needs to be but doesn't strive to impress. And, most importantly, the price will barely dent the monthly budget.

La Vita feels like a standard Italian-American restaurant that spent a semester studying abroad. The caprese salad, normally a simple dish of sliced tomatoes and mozzarella topped with basil leaves and olive oil, is here more of a caprese-esque salad. Cherry tomatoes, bits of mozzarella and slivers of basil sit atop a bed of mixed greens. On the lasagna, the red sauce is made from scratch and the sweet Italian sausage is made by Terranova grocery across the street. The tasty margherita pizza has fresh toppings and an unusual crust. The dough is buttery and bready, like a thin version of the famous Chicago deep-dish pie.

Gabrielle, the previous occupant of this building, drew diners from across the country. La Vita is more likely to draw customers from around the block. But there's nothing wrong with a restaurant that aims to feed its neighbors. *3201 Esplanade Ave., 948-0077, Sun-Thr 11am-12am, Fri-Sat 11am-1am.*

—Todd A. Price