

10/26/09 - Gjelina Restaurant

It is autumn in Los Angeles. The intense blue sky was crystal clear and particulate free courtesy of the hot Santa Anna Winds. Although summer has clearly passed and the days are becoming very short, this day was quite hot, in the high 90's.

I made dinner reservations at Gjelina some 3-4 weeks ago, highly recommended unless you want to take your chances at one of two large communal tables that are always full, based on the buzz from some of my foodie friends.

Located on the artsy, restaurant studded Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice, Gjelina is so happening, there is no name or address numbers posted on the outside of the building. I let my instincts or 'the force' if you will guide me to the right doorway. The accommodating hostess led us through the packed interior including an open appetizer prep bar, out back to a private walled patio with banquets, small tables and a fire pit.

It was an eclectic crowd, peppered with art gallery types, young couples, and celebratory groups. The menu of appealing choices is for sharing. Gjelina ascribes to a philosophy of using as much sustainable, local, and organic food as possible, so the produce is seasonally appropriate.

We ordered:

Rocket (wild arugula) with sweet corn, cherry tomato, endive, lemon, and pecorino

Haricots Verts with charred tomato, feta, mint, and sesame

Wood roasted cauliflower with garlic, chili, parsley, and vinegar

Mushroom, goat cheese, and truffle oil Pizza

Artichoke and goat cheese ravioli with leeks, brown butter, balsamic, and parmesan

Brewed mint iced tea

Strawberry, rhubarb crisp with cornmeal topping, served with house made vegan coconut sorbet

Coffee

I thought every dish was seasoned well, not overly salty like so many trendy places. The vegetable dishes all had a balance of acid with the green fresh flavors, and some oil to smooth the palate. Wood roasted cauliflower was a fantastic choice for an autumn dinner by a fire pit. The pizza was irresistible with just enough mild flavored goat cheese and earthy truffle oil. I like to order ravioli when we eat out, when someone other than I has made them.

We decided not to order wine, since we were getting up early the next morning, although this menu could have taken on a red or white. Buttery, with the right balance of acid and sweet, corn meal topped strawberry rhubarb crisp was so good I came home and made some myself. Try this recipe it is yummy and easy. I think several of the other menu items could also be made easily at home

Individual Strawberry Rhubarb Crisps

Filling

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

2 pints of fresh strawberries

2 large stalks of rhubarb (about two cups sliced)

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons corn starch

Zest from the lemon

Topping

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup corn meal

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup light brown sugar

3 tablespoons all purpose unbleached flour

Zest grated from one orange

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon salt

7 tablespoons unsalted butter

Wash and hull the strawberries, lay them on a towel to dry and then slice them in half. Wash the rhubarb stalks and slice them in half lengthwise and then in half inch dice. Combine the fruit with the sugar in a frying pan. Place the pan on low heat and as the sugar melts, add the lemon juice, lemon zest, and cornstarch. Gently stir the fruit occasionally, until the sugar dissolves and the mixture begins to bubble and thicken. This only takes a few moments. Remove from the heat.

Divide this filling evenly amongst 5 large ramekins.

In a medium bowl, combine all the topping ingredients except the butter. Cube the butter into ½ inch squares and add it to the bowl. Cut in the butter until the mixture is sticking together a bit, but still course. Distribute the topping evenly over the tops of the ramekins.

Place the ramekins on a large baking sheet to catch any drips, and bake for about 20 minutes in a preheated 400° oven. Remove the strawberry rhubarb crisp from the oven when the filling is beginning to bubble up around the nicely browned topping. Serve the crisps plain, with ice cream, or sorbet.







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