



We've long been fans of Basil Brick Oven, a justly revered gem on Astoria Blvd. (<http://www.cityspoonful.com/basil-brick-oven-pizza-a-great-restaurant-grows-up-in-astoria/>). Their well-charred, innovatively-topped northern Italian-style pizza is among our favorites in NYC. (Lucky us, living within their delivery range!)

So we were thrilled when Bradley Hawks (<http://www.bradleyhawks.com/>) invited us to attend a tasting dinner to preview Basil's expansive, innovative new menu.

For the finer points and greater detail, be sure to check out @TastoriaQueens's review (link below). Our general impressions of the stand-out dishes in last night's marathon feast are below.

The octopus carpaccio (shown here) was impressive: a tender, delicate cross-section of what looked like an entire octopus draped over fresh greens with dill, grape tomatoes, and fresh lemon juice kicking in flavor and textural contrasts.

The potato-pesto lasagna, also popular at our table, offered an innovative, flavorful new take on typical meat+marinara lasagnas. (This vegetarian was particularly grateful to encounter such an excellent meatless option on the new menu.) The pesto, which I assume was made in-house (like so many of Basil's cheeses and other ingredients), was particularly fresh, light, and flavorful.

Also innovative -- several new pizzas that bravely reject the use of red sauce. Instead, Chef Daniele has created vegetable "pastes" made from artichoke, porcini mushrooms, and asparagus. The porcini-based sauce was deeply savory and extremely tasty.

Another innovative pizza that caught my eye: bresaola (salted, dried beef) paired with housemade mozzarella and fresh, peppery arugala. This vegetarian could only look, not taste, unfortunately -- though the toppings' deep greens and maroons were impressive enough.

This incredible feast also included several new risottos (creamy goodness!), gnocchi in a pesto-cream sauce, lobster ravioli, and tender (looking) lamb, pork and salmon dishes.

But our favorite dish was the spinach salad with candied walnuts, tomato, and fried goat cheese. Not only were the vegetables extremely fresh, but the dressing was simply addictive -- refreshingly tangy and yet ever-so-subtly funky. Chef Daniele kept mum on the ingredients in play, but we imagined a few stray shakes of fish sauce (or dabs or anchovy paste?) in the mix.

Our thanks to our hosts at Basil -- and, as always, to Bradley Hawks, for organizing yet another delicious and totally enjoyable evening.

Basil's innovative, new menu is certainly worth checking out -- this neighborhood gem just keeps getting better and better.

<http://tastoriaqueens.com/2013/02/07/to-change-with-grace-and-ease-oh-basil-brick-oven-pizza-if-i-could-be-more-like-thee/>