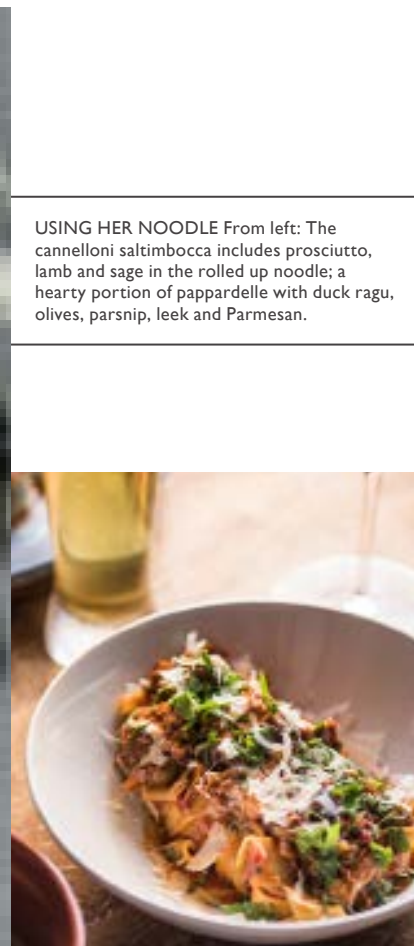


# Flour POWER

At the West Loop's Monteverde, a former Spiaggia chef combines her pasta-making expertise and passion for authentic Italian cuisine with a modern touch to winning results.

By Lisa Shames // Photography by Anthony Tablier



USING HER NOODLE From left: The cannelloni saltimbocca includes prosciutto, lamb and sage in the rolled up noodle; a hearty portion of pappardelle with duck ragu, olives, parsnip, leek and Parmesan.

**W**e met last summer at an outdoor food festival. Our time together was brief, but I was smitten. While I knew our paths would cross again, I didn't know if the infatuation would still be there. With these types of things, it rarely is. As it turned out, the second encounter was even better than I remembered the first time around and so was the third.

Now, I can say, without a doubt, that the genius of chef Sarah Grueneberg's prosciutto butter toast wasn't a fluke. Rather, the simple-sounding snack of lightly toasted multigrain bread spread with prosciutto-infused butter and topped with dill, candied Meyer lemon and thinly sliced radishes is a dish worth pining over. And the same can be said for pretty much all the dishes at

Monteverde, her and partner Meg Sah's (Terzo Piano) new Italian-inspired restaurant.

If you've heard anything about the West Loop restaurant beyond the difficulty of snagging a reservation, it's been about the pastas—and rightfully so. Grueneberg spent eight years at Spiaggia, where she perfected her pasta-making techniques. While there she had many opportunities to travel to Italy. It was during one of those trips where the name for the restaurant was born. "Monteverde is 'green mountain' in Italian," says Grueneberg, "and my last name is 'green mountain' in German." After an Italian purveyor scribbled that revelation in Grueneberg's journal, the name stuck. But the restaurant's moniker is more than a sweet story; it also speaks to Monteverde's food, which grabs inspiration, technique and ingredients from outside Italy too.

Those pastas—watch them CONTINUED...

## MONTEVERDE

1020 W. Madison St.,  
monteverdechicago.com,  
312.888.3041

Open for dinner  
Tue.-Sat. 5-10PM  
Snacks: \$6-\$8; appetizers:  
\$10-\$14; pastas: \$13-\$15;  
for the table: \$25-\$52;  
desserts: \$5-\$12



« If you take away the borders people share that's when you see some of these dishes come to life.

—SARAH GRUENEBERG, CHEF-PARTNER, MONTEVERDE »



...CONTINUED being made behind the bar in the custom-built *pastificio* (pasta-making station) that serves as a focal point of the restaurant—are divided into *Atipica* (non-traditional) and *Tipica* (traditional) on the menu. That means in her version of cannelloni, she rolls the pasta with lamb, prosciutto and Manchego and then slices it into pinwheels. A quick pan sear adds texture. For Monteverde's *arrabbiata*, Grueneberg throws the noodles, spicy tomato-based sauce and head-on shrimp into a wok, which brings a touch of sweetness to the dish.

On the traditional side, there's a terrific duck ragu paired with pappardelle as well as winter squash tortelloni. But don't dawdle as Grueneberg's working on swapping in some lighter pastas soon.

Monteverde isn't just a carb-lover's paradise. Chicken livers get a quick dip in flour and buttermilk before they're tossed in the wok with tomato and Calabrian chiles. They're served atop a bed of decadent polenta. "It's my little wink and thank you to Tony [Mantuano] for all he's taught me," says Grueneberg, adding that it was the Spiaggia chef-partner's grandmother who inspired the dish. Ocean trout, from the small plates section, offers a diverse group of supporting flavors including charred Brussels sprouts, sesame and yogurt, that play very nicely together.

On the heartier side, Grueneberg brilliantly subs in skate wing for pork in her schnitzel. The mammoth piece of fish is crispy and is paired with brown butter, capers and a chicory-citrus salad that's topped with a zippy vinaigrette that helps balance the dish's richness.

Balance and restraint go out the window in a good way with the *ragù alla Napoletana*. Dubbed "a big bowl of awesome" by my dining companion, the For the Table dish includes housemade sausages, bouncy meatballs and fusilli pasta, all bathed in a rich red sauce.

If that weren't enough, an uber-tender bone-in pork shank stands at attention in the oval serving platter.

It's not easy to save room for dessert, but if you do, reward yourself with salted butterscotch budino; its bruleed top is a nice contrast to the pudding's creamy texture.

The comfort-food stance of Monteverde's menu offerings is complemented by the decor. Taking cues from an Italian home, the 95-seat restaurant has a warmth to it with tones of plums and muted greens. Richly grained wood is a theme throughout, from the open shelves and floors to the bar, which features a butcher-block top. If you arrive minus a reservation it's where you'll be sitting. It's a nice option.

On the beverage side, wines skew mostly Italian—the 2013 Giuseppe Cortese Langhe Nebbiolo (\$14 by the glass) holds up well to the spicy flavors in the dishes. Cocktails take a similar unfussy approach as the food, including my favorite, the refreshing Sardinian Bandit, made with Death's Door gin, Mirto Judu (a Sardinian liqueur), absinthe and egg white.

While some might question the liberties Grueneberg takes with a beloved cuisine, she sees her interpretations differently. "If you take away the borders people share," she says, "that's when you see some of these dishes come to life."

SITTING PRETTY  
From left: Karen Herold of Studio K designed Monteverde, which features a rustic yet modern setting; the Sardinian Bandit cocktail includes Death's Door Gin and Mirto Judu, a Sardinian liqueur.