

Indulge

REVIEW



Authentic Italia

Bellina Alimentari infuses Italian flavors into Ponce City Market's popular food hall.

BY KATE PARHAM KORDSMEIER | PHOTOS: SARA HANNA

On a trip to Atlanta's buzzed-over Ponce City Market, you can sit down to a sizzling plate of Mapo Tofu at Jia, grab a bag of South African jerky at Biltong Bar, split a massive Cuban sandwich at El Super Pan, snag a bureka at Marrakesh and, soon, slurp a bowl of authentic Japanese ramen at Ton Ton. And while these global hotspots are dripping with flavor, intrigue and promise, sometimes, all you really want is a bowl of good old-fashioned spaghetti.

When your comfort food cravings come calling, head to Bellina Alimentari, a classic Italian market-meets-wine-bar-meets-culinary-club that's taking it back to basics. Through longtime Atlanta chef Dave Berry, who hails from Horsehead Grill, mans the stove, Bellina is really Israeli architect and designer Tal Postelnik Baum's brainchild.

Baum spent the last seven years working in restaurants in Florence, Italy, before returning to Atlanta and opening Bellina to pay homage to her time there. She enlisted famed Atlanta designer Smith Haney (you've seen his work at The Optimist and Le Fat) to deck out the gorgeous industrial space with

walnut wood tambour, marble counters, aged brass, hand-hammered metal and amber glass.

Admittedly, Bellina packs a lot into one space, but it's the largest in the market's Food Hall with 4,000 square feet. And yet, you'd almost miss the restaurant if you weren't looking closely.

The grocery, stocked with imported oils, sauces, dried pastas and condiments, spans the entire front space, complete with a carry-out counter selling fresh pastas, sauces, salads and paninis.

But behind all the artisanal goodies, you'll find a 14-seat wine bar and intimate dining area overlooking the mesmerizing dough room. During the day, you can watch Chef Berry hand-making pasta and bread. And at night, it's transformed into a culinary club where private dinners, cooking classes and tastings are held (think Single Mingle Pasta Making, Introduction to Amaro, Pizza Making and 5 Wine, 3 Cheese).

Quality is the name of the game here. Any of the edible ingredients that aren't imported from Italy are made from scratch in-house or sourced from local purveyors, such as the Spotted Trotters' meats and cheeses, and other local food champions, such as Anson Mills, Brasstown Beef and White Oak Pastures.

But Bellina's commitment to local doesn't stop with the food. Don't miss the hand-painted barfront by Tommy Taylor, the forged chandeliers featuring metalwork by Andrew Crawford, hand-blown glass lights by Janke Studios and a towering wine bar constructed by Wood Mill Lab.

Even the dishware is locally made. Atlanta carpenter Koby Downs created an exclusive line of ambrosia maple serving boards (charcuterie and cheese are served on these, and they're available for sale in the market), while Decatur pottery studio MudFire's signature ceramic plateware is used and sold, too.

We prefer the ceramics when they come yielding pasta, such as the creamy, earthy mushroom ragu served over perfectly al dente tagliolini, a traditional long, ribbon-like pasta from Emilia Romagna, Italy.

The dish is a lesson in minimalism, much like the rest of Berry's thoughtful menu, where high-quality, seasonal ingredients call the shots, and no dish is trying to be something it's not. For proof, see the *polpetta al sugo*, a Fontina-stuffed meatball bathed in fresh and tangy red sauce and garnished with freshly shaved parmesan.

For lunch, stick with soups and pasta. A



Above: Meat-lovers will rejoice in the *polpetta al sugo*, meatballs stuffed with Fontina, sprinkled with parmesan and served atop a tangy red sauce. Previous page: Simple yet delicious—Bellina's pesto pasta entree, a rustic combination of fennel, seal pesto and shaved parmesan reggiano.



Earthy and decadent, the mushroom tagliatelle is rustic Italian cooking at its finest.

velvety butternut squash soup garnished with housemade winter pesto (kale gives it a superfood boost!) and a creamy dip of mascarpone far outshines the prosciutto panini, which sounds good (great, even) in theory, but in reality is overpowered by cumbersome, too-thick slabs of bread.

Likewise, the inaptly named crudo was misleading and thus disappointing. What is normally a bright and vibrant raw fish or tartare dish in Italy, this crudo was a plain green salad, no more special than a bag of mixed lettuce you'd find at Publix.

Bellina's outstanding wine program makes up for it. Though you'll find seasonal house-made sodas, craft beers and draft cocktails (go for the Negroni, an Italian classic), the wine list really shines in the natural and biodynamic selections, most notably the extensive list of orange wine (dry white wine fermented with the skins on). Four options are available, all of which are also offered by the half-glass and glass (read: perfect for taste testing), ranging from dry and delicate to funky and full-on barnyard.

Likewise, the already impressive Amaro program continues to grow each day as more guests swap tired vodka for something with far more flavor and interest. Hint: Do it! The bitter Italian herbal liqueur is the perfect ending to your sure-to-be-fabulous meal. Cin Cin! ■

BELLINA ALIMENTARI

675 Ponce De Leon Ave. NE, #E-16-11, Atlanta 30308, 404.252.9935 bellina-alimentari.com

Recommended: *Formaggio board*, \$16; *Marta board*, \$18; *Tagliolini della Scardina*, \$14; *Polpetta al sugo*, \$12; *Duca soup*, \$9

Bottom line: An ode to simple comfort food done well.



Cheers!

Come to Bellina Alimentari for the food, but stay for the wine and cocktails. Don't miss the negroni or draft at Bellina.

And whether you're a bona fide oenophile or a total noob, you won't want to miss Bellina's orange wines. Their extensive list of orange wine is one-of-a-kind in the city and is offered by the glass and half-glass.



What your aperitivo with an antipasto—in this case, a Misto Board bearing local and Italian charcuterie, house-baked bread, cheese and marinated olives

