

# Return to Form

## Grand hotel dining is back at the Westin

The beautiful restaurant at the Westin hotel is back, and it's more beautiful than ever. Centro is the new name for the space formerly known as Agora, which was one of the city's best restaurants a decade ago. After the departure of Chef Derek Wagner, who went on to open the fabulous Nicks on Broadway, Agora slipped into that boring hotel restaurant persona with a rather generic menu. Open since August of last year, Centro seems determined to make dining at the Westin exciting once again.

This is a big restaurant with soaring ceilings and huge windows that offer city views. The layout is the same, with a jazzed-up bar and lounge area on the right, which you walk through to get to the huge dining room. The formally set tables are widely spaced, which provides privacy for conversations, whether they be romantic or based in business. Like most hotel restaurants, Centro is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Centro has a mostly Italian menu,

although there are some classic New England dishes as well as meat and seafood to please just about everyone – a wise decision for any restaurant located within a hotel. According to Manager Joe Delle Cave (who you might remember from Moda), the name Centro was chosen because the menu offers many dishes from the central part of Italy.

When you go to Centro, please order the Sushi-Style Prosciutto, one of the most unique appetizers I've ever enjoyed. At first glance, you will think you've been served a platter of basic sushi with all the essential accoutrements. But a closer look reveals what's really on the stark white oblong platter. A Japanese soup spoon holds not soy sauce but a balsamic glaze. What you think is wasabi is green olive tapenade, and finely sliced red onion stands in for the usual pickled ginger. No, those aren't chopsticks but rather pencil-thin breadsticks. Delicate slices of prosciutto have been rolled up and sliced, much like a classic California roll. Pop



one in your mouth, and you will taste grilled eggplant, fresh mozzarella, roasted red peppers and basil. It's bit pricey at \$14, but there's enough there to feed four people as a first course.

Another wonderful appetizer is the Raviolo (\$13): one very large, handmade ravioli that is stuffed (and I do mean stuffed) with Gorgonzola cheese, ricotta and walnuts in *burro noce* – that's Italian for walnut butter sauce. Yes, you could share this dish, but it's so good you won't want to.

Every salad is tempting, mostly because of the different dressings. The arugula has a sun-dried fig dressing, and the spinach is paired with white balsamic vinaigrette. We loved the Romaine Salad (\$10 and more than enough for two to share) with its full-of-flavor focaccia croutons, shavings of grana cheese and blood orange dressing. This was a whole new twist on the classic Caesar salad.

Our only disappointment was the Tuscan White Bean Soup (\$8). The menu said "with sausage," but there was little to be found in the broth.

If it's lunchtime, we heartily recommend the Centro Burger (\$16). Everything about this big burger on toasted brioche pleased us. The eight ounces of Black Angus meat was topped with crispy prosciutto, Gorgonzola cheese and pickled red onions. On the side was a ramekin of Chianti ketchup, which we will never tire of, especially when added to the excellent steak fries that came with this very Italian burger.

At dinner, I would undoubtedly order the Pan-Seared King Salmon (\$23) again and again. A very generous slab of thick salmon, cooked perfectly, was

served over a mellow Parmigiano potato cake (just like my mother used to make). The salmon was dressed with a limoncello reduction, a brilliant pairing of flavors, with fried caper berries and sautéed arugula alongside.

After all these wonderful Italian flavors, I was craving a bit of gelato to end my meal but instead chose the Flourless Frangelico Chocolate Torte (\$9), which was surprisingly light, topped with a mixed berry sauce, a bit of whipped cream and premium vanilla ice cream. The serving seemed small, but it was really just enough.

All the usual desserts, such as Tiramisu and Crème Brûlée, are also on the menu at Centro, as well as the much more interesting Panna Cotta with Amarena (sour cherries) and the Pear-Ricotta Cheesecake with Vin Santo caramel.

No matter how many good restaurants a city has, a fine hotel needs a signature spot. The Westin is now back in the game.

*Linda Beaulieu is the author of The Providence and Rhode Island Cookbook, available at stores throughout the state.*



Slow-cooked cod with poached baby shrimp, tomato confit and saffron-mussel broth

### Centro

One West Exchange Street (at the Westin)  
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[westinprovidence.com/centro-restaurant](http://westinprovidence.com/centro-restaurant)

Photography: Kate Kelley