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Tru-Fire Kitchen & Bar Fires Up in Frisco

by Teresa Gubbins



Chicken parmesan



photography by Kevin Hunter Marple

TruFire Kitchen & Bar, a new Italian-Mediterranean concept, brings a touch of the handmade, the gourmet, the artisan, to suburban Frisco. Not too much—just a touch, just enough for the neighborhood.

For now, it is a stand-alone restaurant, a single branch, the brainchild of veteran restaurateurs who say all the right things: They love Frisco, they want to be part of the neighborhood, they want to serve good food and wine.

It just so happens that the restaurateurs in question—David Kazarian and Jay Clark, partnered with Steve Hartnett, founder of Cool River, who now co-owns all except the Lemmon Avenue location of Bob's Steak & Chop House—have all been masters of the restaurant-chain universe, with years of experience at Phil Romano's Macaroni Grill, Pei Wei, Tin Star, Fox & Hound, and more.

TruFire thus inevitably exhibits the kind of polish you see at a chain. The place is spacious, clean, and bustling, with plenty of servers to attend to diners' needs. Cooks clang contentedly in a dramatic open kitchen, which creates a feeling of comfort and opulence.

The food is as appealing as the atmosphere. The compact menu reads like some perfectly researched wish fulfillment of what your typical diner says he wants: American with Italian and Mediterranean notes (pastas, pizzas, salads, sliders) plus occasional overtures to foodie sensibilities, all priced from \$9 to \$19.

If it sounds like what a lot of other places are doing, check the details. Where else at this level is serving salads with pricey heirloom tomatoes, thin-crust pizzas made with flour imported from Italy, or house-made Mission fig dressing? Not Carrabba's, not Brio Tuscan Grille.

At its worst, the menu verges on generic. At its best, TruFire reaches a level of excellence you'd expect from a fine-dining restaurant.



FIRE WORKS: Pesto Pizza and Mediterranean shrimp salad.

photography by Kevin Hunter Marple

Pizzas were terrific, with the dough exhibiting exemplary characteristics—crisp on the exterior, but with a touch of pliability at the center, with palpable flavors of salt and yeast that gave them sufficient personality to stand on their own. TruFire even offers a whole-wheat version of the crust, pioneered by California Pizza Kitchen.

Toppings had a California touch as well. Rosemary's chicken came covered with tender shreds of chicken, mushrooms roasted nice and dark, plus garlic, rosemary, and fresh mozzarella. Pesto was a flavorful vegetarian option topped with roasted onions, peppers, squash, goat cheese, house-made pecan pesto, and the signature "TruPizza" sauce.

They take a unique approach with the sauce by adding it to the top of the pizza, ladling it carefully around the toppings so that the items retain their flavor and presence, and so that the sauce doesn't saturate the crust.

The prosciutto pizza stood out from the rest, with a thinner crust, almost like a flatbread. The distinctive toppings alone were worth the drive to Frisco: shaved prosciutto, house-made fig glaze, drizzles of honey, Danish blue cheese, and caramelized onion. It provided a thrilling interplay of salty, savory, and sweet.

Fig showed up in the dressing on the Texas pecan and fig salad, one of those increasingly popular salads that tosses in nuts and fruit with the greens. In this case, it was organic field greens topped with blue cheese, Texas pecan halves in a peppery crunchy glaze, and chunks of firm, sweet pear. Prices on salads run from \$11 to \$13, but they're big enough for a meal or to split between two or three people as a salad course.

Pastas included a bold rigatoni, neatly cooked to just this side of chewy, with slices of Italian sausage, medium-sized shrimp, prosciutto, and sun-dried tomatoes in a roasted garlic cream sauce. TruMAC was the restaurant's rendition of macaroni and cheese, made with corkscrew-shaped cavatappi pasta coated in a roasted butternut cream sauce that was heavy on the cream and light on the butternut. Applewood-smoked bacon and white truffle oil added a sexy smokiness.

Helping to offset the chain vibe were the glimmers of personality that reflected the whims of the owners. Kazarian grew up with hummus and is so proud of his version that he had to put it on the menu. Neither too smooth nor too chunky, it had a nutty, profound earthiness that seemed to reflect the depth of his pride. Philly bruschetta was goofy but satisfying, with chunks of beef tenderloin plus mixed sautéed mushrooms and onions on garlic bread, smothered with cheese. China Ranch dates, from China Ranch in California, were filled with Parmesan cheese, wrapped with thinly sliced applewood-smoked bacon, and roasted until hot and slightly gooey.

The wine list was cleverly split into three categories, with the bottom called "\$25 bottles"—nice, simple, and friendly to wine drinkers. At the high end were bottles such as the \$88 Duckhorn Paraduxx, an accessible blend of red Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon. TruFire resides in the spot previously occupied by the short-lived Josephine's, but they've updated the interior to make the bar more prominent, because that's what the neighborhood wants. 6959 Lebanon Rd., No. 114, Frisco. 214-872-3830. \$\$-\$\$\$.