

# Tracking down a gem tucked in Natick Center

April 27, 2008



A year after moving from Wellesley, Gourmet Decisions Cafe & Grill has settled nicely into its larger quarters along the Washington Street restaurant row in Natick Center, with plenty of kitchen space for its active catering and meals-to-go operations, and a charming dining room.

If only its owners could convince the telephone company, and by extension, the online mapping services, that it is their unmarked delivery entrance, not the front door, that is around the corner on South Avenue. First-time customers who did a quick map search rather than visiting the restaurant's website, would appreciate it, too, since they could avoid studying a block of blank storefronts for clues as to where they might have gone wrong.

The drizzle on a recent Friday night had aggravated our frustration by the time a scouting party found Gourmet Decisions on the opposite side of the block, tucked next to the Dolphin Seafood restaurant on Washington Street's parking lot. And then things started getting better in a hurry.

Of course, our travails pale beside the complications suffered by chef and co-owner Richard Prioli, whose recovery from a traffic accident has allowed Gourmet Decisions to reopen after a hiatus of nearly two months. Partner Stephanie Spinosa, who manages the business side and provides a welcoming presence for customers, said Prioli took a lesson from his forced absence and is sharing some of his responsibilities in the kitchen.

Whoever is at the helm out back, they know what they are doing. The menu offers an impressive array of dishes with distinctive ingredients, particularly considering the cafe is open for dinner just three nights a week.

The restaurant, which is also a popular spot for breakfast and lunch, is a square, Romanesque room with a tall ceiling and tasteful furnishings. There are roughly a dozen tables offering seating for 50, and the casual atmosphere sets the stage for a relaxing dining experience. The alcohol license permits only beer and wine to be sold, but the selection is carefully chosen and reasonably priced.

## Gourmet Decisions Cafe & Grill

12 Washington St., Natick

Telephone: 508-647-4024

Website: [gourmetdecisions.com](http://gourmetdecisions.com)

Hours: Breakfast and lunch, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; dinner, 5-9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

Major credit cards

Reservations accepted

Accessible to the handicapped

From the list of interesting appetizers, a vegetarian version of the "very thin crust pizza" offers a delightful combination of San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella cheese, and sweet basil (\$10) on a platter-size crust made of flax, oat bran, and whole-wheat flours; healthy and delicious.

The Gorgonzola tomato stack salad (\$8) is a striking vertical arrangement of organic baby greens, sweet basil, and sharp, salty cheese layered between beefsteak slices, pinned into place with a crisp breadstick, and sprinkled with bits of fresh mozzarella and toasted pine nuts.

For a lighter main course, the cafe offers its Caesar and country salads with grilled free-range chicken breast (\$12) or olive-oil poached wild salmon fillet (\$18). The thick wedge of salmon was flavorful, but perhaps a bit dry. The country salad provided a healthy base of organic field greens and romaine lettuce, julienned vegetables, goat cheese, and dried cranberries, accompanied by a tangy, sweet-and-sour vinaigrette.

"My Grandmother's Ravioli & Tomato" (\$16), large, round ravioli stuffed with four cheeses and tossed with chopped fresh Roma tomatoes, roasted garlic, olive oil, fresh basil, and chips of Parmesan cheese, offers a combination of flavors and textures that filled a previously unnoticed hankering for comfort food. Another tantalizing option for fans of meat-free fare, the grilled zucchini steaks and roasted sweet peppers (\$18), has layers of fresh Bufala mozzarella and fire-roasted tomatoes, served with feta-cheese crumbles and a ragout of white beans.

One of the chef's specialties, the rack of lamb (\$24), features plump morsels of herb-encrusted meat, tender and flavorful in a rich Chianti reduction sauce, and accompanied by roasted red bliss potatoes and Tuscan baby spinach.

Dessert might have seemed a tad excessive, until we dug into the warm apple pie and vanilla ice cream (\$5) and extreme chocolate cake (\$6). Our doubts were sweetly dispatched in short order. We won't be needing Google's help to find our way back.

TERRY FITZGERALD

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