

# Deliciously unpredictable

## lorio earns its title as Best of Portland

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Karl Kuchs/Vanguard staff

**Portland's Best Chef** Chris Thompson prepares handmade ravioli.

It is only on sporadic occasions that a single mouthful will make me react with a full-on face of foodie pleasure. One bite that can cause my eyes to roll back, shoulders to arch and an actual auditory reflex of "Mmmm." I can honestly say, without question, that every dish ordered at lorio created just such a reaction.

Hearing the words "best restaurant" generally piques interest, but not without a heaping serving of skepticism on the side. Many factors come into play when comparing the cuisine of one restaurant against another. It's even more intriguing when the decision is left up to an entire city of eaters instead of a select group of critics. So when Portland Citysearch chose lorio as the best restaurant of 2010, I decided it was time to see what the hype was all about.

From the outside, lorio Italian restaurant is just a small window front, tucked in next to a comedy club and a bike shop along Hawthorne Boulevard. The dining area is warm, cozy and unpretentious. I immediately appreciated the decorators sense of humor, as right behind my table hung an oil painting of two refrigerators wandering the Italian countryside.

The handmade ravioli of the day was unbelievably good. The thick and tender raviolis, filled with an inspired concoction of smoked salmon, kale, caramelized onions and ricotta,

were topped with a rosy tomato and cream sauce and surrounded by some sweet pesto oil.

Never in my life have I experienced Italian food so full of surprising flavors. It really takes an imaginative palate to combine the smoky salmon with the sweet tang of onions and earthy kale, all brought together by creamy ricotta that can only be described as heavenly.

Another notable choice is the slow roasted pork shoulder, braised in Madeira wine, served on top of a triangle of polenta and a variety of vegetables. The shredded pork was rich, hearty, succulent and practically melted in my mouth.

lorio's dedication to using local organic produce and sustainable meats is evident in every fresh and lively plate. Mingling with the pork was a medley of savory green beans, cauliflower, broccoli, squash, carrots and kale. It's an entrée that practically incorporates the flavors of a complete farm, all delicately balanced and delicious.

I did my best to save room and end the evening with a slice of chocolate mousse cake. It was moist, luscious, just the right amount of sweet, and a decadent finale to one of the best meals I've had in Portland.

It has been all too often that I shy away from dining out on Italian food, usually disappointed by dishes that are heavy, bland and predictable. lorio has offered a reawakening, making me realize there are chefs such as Chris Thompson out there who carefully craft each of their menu items to absolute culinary perfection.

As odd as it may be to point out a seemingly obvious trait, the wait staff was attentive, personable and extremely knowledgeable about all of the marvelous food at lorio—they were just the right amount of helpful.

As a generous promotion, so that all of PSU can enjoy lorio, Chef Thompson offers 10 percent off to customers with a PSU student ID.

lorio deserves nothing less than the highest stamp of approval, and I personally hope that as many Portlanders as possible get to experience their truly extraordinary food. ■