

CANTINETTA ANTINORI

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First, a warning: if you just want good, cheerful, value-for-money grub, without pedigree wines and linen on your table, then head to Il Mare (see review). Ditto if you're taking your parents or in-laws for lunch.

I hate to apply the word 'pretentious' to restaurants who are merely serious, or offer especially fine cooking, but Cantinetta Antinori somehow sits awkwardly on the border—not because of its cooking (here I might differ from those who claim the likes of Il Mare are better—not better, or worse, just different, (though I'll allow 'more subtle')), even less so because of its vast range of superior wines (the Antinori wine family does not rule over Tuscany for nothing). I apply it in this case because of the restaurant's service, which is so aloof it's almost unforgivable.

Had I not been so put off, I would have forgiven them the slightly overcooked *branzino* and the lasagna awkwardly served on a bowl—thankfully my creamy fettucine with shavings of fresh truffle, which I find truly lovely—*subtle*, there I say it again, because the ingredients merit such a treatment—and the homemade *cappellacci*, filled with ricotta and served with thyme butter, show what the kitchen can really do. Thyme turns out to be an effective substitute to the more often used sage; it brings out, quite nicely, the nuttiness of the parmesan and ricotta filling. At least there is something new to learn.

But not enough to make me want to linger for their warm chocolate cake—reportedly to die for. You could argue that the superior attitude of the waitstaff is merely period detail, a cultural quirk meant to be tolerated and endured, much like the gruffness of the grand Viennese coffee houses, and is not meant to stick. But, like a bad joke, or a racist movie, I find that it does stick while the rest of the meal fades.







