

LOUIE BOSSI'S IS A MODERN AMERICAN-ITALIAN RESTAURANT BOASTING OLD WORLD TECHNIQUES

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Margherita pizza. [Click here for a closer look at Louie Bossi's.](#)

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The scene at Louie Bossi's Ristorante Bar and Pizzeria in Fort Lauderdale is fueled by intense energy. On a recent weekday evening, every inch of the main dining room is jammed like the Dolphin Expressway at rush hour. Except here, people seem perfectly agreeable with being elbow to elbow.

From the large table of elderly patrons picking over a few pizza pies, to the couple at the 15-seat salumi bar sharing slabs of cured meat and a bottle of wine, and the rowdy group at the corner booth in back putting back cocktails and sharing a trilevel, tiered platter of appetizers, the commotion never seems to stop. At one point the hum of conversation is so loud, you can barely hear the music, your server, or even your own thoughts.

"We're seeing a return to slow food and Old World techniques."

When you build an Italian restaurant such as this in South Florida, it seems the patronage will deliver itself in droves. Large

concepts are nothing new for the aptly named Big Time Restaurant Group, also known for Big City Tavern (the group's first Las Olas establishment best-known for its house-cured meats and American-style grazing menu), City Oyster (a refined sit-down sushi and oyster bar off Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach), and City Cellar (a longstanding eatery and wine bar at West Palm Beach's City Place).



Chef and partner Louie Bossi

Lisabet Summa, Big Time's director of culinary operations, and former Big City Tavern phenom chef Louie Bossi are the dynamic duo behind the group's most recent undertaking, what stands as Big Time's largest custom-curated operation to date, and one Summa says has been years in the making.

"We felt there would be this amazing opening for a great pizzeria in downtown Fort Lauderdale," says Summa. "In recent years, Louie had introduced a lot of Italian menu items to Big City Tavern – things like pizza and his house-made salumi. He'd done such an amazing job, we knew it was enough to branch off into a singular concept."

When the space at 1032 E. Las Olas Blvd., previously home to Italian restaurant Solita, became available, the team knew it was the perfect fit. They stripped away the old façade and rebuilt, delivering a sprawling, custom, 6,000-square-foot design, one that took the better part of 2014 to construct. The result is a gigantic Italian eatery, complete with a stylish bar and cocktail area, bustling open kitchen, communal salumi bar, and indoor-outdoor dining areas.

The back garden is more piazza than patio, allowing for quasi-alfresco dining beneath a retractable opaque glass roof, tables, and lounge-style seating propped atop a faux grass lawn, creating an ethereal escape from the raucous din of the main dining room.



Beef carpaccio

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Despite the infamous South Florida summer slump, getting a seat at Louie Bossi's – either indoors or out – may take some time. Since doors opened in June, the nightly line at the hostess stand grows larger with every hour, people jostling for position as hurried wait staff and meandering patrons break through the line.

The hype is no doubt over the food, a menu of biblical proportions, with everything from homemade pasta and wood-grilled, dry-aged steaks to Neapolitan-style pizza and house-cured meats.

"Our country's modern culinary movement is a reaction to industrialized food," says Summa. "In big cities like New York and Chicago and San Francisco, we're seeing a return to slow food and Old World techniques. And that's what we wanted Louie Bossi's to stand for: a scratch kitchen using real ingredients and products with integrity."

What does all that taste like? A lot of work, for one. Both Summa and Bossi traveled extensively for months, learning the art of meat-curing and pizza-making from the pros. They also modeled their concept around the ideals practiced by Old World-style artisans, garnering inspiration from a fifth-generation, 100-year-old Italian butcher shop in San Francisco, a 60-year-old pizza parlor in New York City, and an old-school salumeria and sausage shop in Chicago.

Likewise, the staff are required to keep the kitchen humming at full steam, from servers who've managed to memorize the minutiae of a menu made up of more than 60 items to chefs that roll, cut, knead, and bake through busy lunch, brunch, and dinner seatings.



Vanilla gelato

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That Bossi and Summa have made such a scene with their grandiose establishment must not detract from their food, however. The menu is an amalgamation of strong Italian dishes made the old-school way: pizza dough formed without commercial yeast, wood-grilled heritage meats, hand-formed pastas, and house-churned gelato.

As a result, the flavors at Louie Bossi's can be so assertive, just one meatball, just one bite of pasta, or just one slice of pizza can be enough to experience every ingredient. When the appetizers arrive, you'll have a hard time choosing between the carpaccio (thin sheets of meat topped with a tangle of olive-oil-glazed arugula, grated shards of pecorino cheese, and a scattering of plump capers) or the oversized veal, pork, and beef meatballs studded with pecorino romano cheese and a special blend of seasonings.

And the bruschetta – there are several options – arrive as a series of crunchy baked ovals of fresh sourdough bread the size of saucers, piled high with piquant pepper and fontina. Or a pungent mushrooms conserva, a dish demanding to be passed around in traditional family-style fashion.

For the main dishes, Bossi steers clear of the half-empty, oversized-plate trend, preferring dishes that overflow with excess. That includes bowls of hand-shaped pasta, such as the hearty mafaldine, scallop-edged shoelace lengths as thick as octopus tentacles smothered in a tangy ragu sauce made with 'nduja, a spreadable spicy pork sausage. Freshly formed, they're chewy – almost doughy – each ribbon coiled around cubes of stringy, sauce-infused pork. The dish is not complete without the finishing touch: a cap of fresh, airy ricotta cheese that multitasks with smooth texture and a cool creaminess.



Outside Louie Bossi's

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The pizza – baked for 90 seconds in a 900-degree wood-burning oven – takes center stage on the menu and in the restaurant. The oven greets you at the front entrance, visible from every corner of the restaurant. A wet sourdough bakes up thin and chewy, blistered black in spots and delivering a strong smoky essence that can be overpowering or just right, depending on your taste. There are more than a dozen to choose from, but the Margherita is the most approachable, smeared with a vibrant San Marzano sauce, basil, sea salt, and imported fior de latte – a soft and buttery cow's milk mozzarella.

"I really wanted to see this kitchen as a place where chefs go to eat on their day off," says Bossi. "It's hard to find a place like that here, unless you drive to Miami. This scratch kitchen is more than just making good food. It's about inspiring others to be excited about making good food. It doesn't have to be complicated to be good."

Of course: Wasn't it the Italians who proved good food doesn't have to be complicated?

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Louie Bossi Ristorante, Bar, Pizzeria is located at 1032 E Las Olas Blvd, Fort Lauderdale. Hours are 11:30 a.m. to midnight Sunday through Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. Friday; and 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday. Call 954-356-6699, or visit louiebossi.com.

Dishes Reviewed:

- Beef carpaccio \$14
- Margherita pizza \$15
- Mafaldine \$21
- New York steak \$29

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