

## Cafe Pasta always a welcome treat

Thursday, November 3, 2011  
(Updated 3:00 am)

By [JOHN BATCHELOR](#)  
Go Triad Restaurant Reviewer

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*Return Visit is an occasional theme column narrating recent experiences in restaurants that have been favorably reviewed in the past. Trying out the hot new place is a popular pastime, but remembering those establishments that have been doing a good job for some time is important as well.*

GREENSBORO — Cafe Pasta and Grille has been operating in the same location under the same ownership for more than 25 years, a milestone matched by only a handful of Triad restaurants.

Such longevity is attributable to the same factors that make this place a personal favorite: value, food and hospitality — essential factors in the success of any restaurant.

Regarding hospitality: Ray Essa, owner and host, is quite a personality. He constantly visits tables, not only checking for guest satisfaction, but providing entertaining conversation. Decor has evolved from the original gray and mauve, chic at the time of the restaurant's birth, to beige-cream stippled walls flanking attractive tile floors in similar colors. You pass a bar as you enter, with two TVs (no sound), a location that attracts a sociable crowd.

Value is Cafe Pasta's strongest point. It is difficult to eat this well at similar prices anywhere else, especially after factoring in the comparatively low costs of quality wines.

Food offerings have expanded beyond the original pasta-only concept, adding grilled items with attention throughout the menu to heart-healthy, low-carb, gluten-free and other dietary-specific arrangements. Menus are reviewed by Cone Health Heart-Healthy Program. At my age, those considerations are appealing, even if I don't always abide by them.

Lots of restaurants serve Spinach-Artichoke Dip. Cafe Pasta's version (\$7.95) just tastes better, a function of predominant artichoke flavor, undergirded by quality cream, cheddar, Fontana and mozzarella cheeses.

I still enjoy pastas most. I have had everything on the menu, and I feel confident recommending any of them. I am most often lured, however, to Spaghetti Bolognese (\$12.95), ground sirloin, roasted peppers and fresh mushrooms in a spicy tomato sauce with Romano cheese; Bouillabaisse (\$17.95), shrimp, scallops, calamari, and clams in a white or red clam sauce



### CAFE PASTA AND GRILL

**Address:** 305 State St., Greensboro

**Phone:** 272-1308

**Website:** [cafepasta.com](http://cafepasta.com)

**Hours:** Lunch: 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Tuesday-Friday; Dinner: 5 to 11 p.m.  
Tuesday-Saturday.

**Reservations:** Accepted

**Sanitation grade:** A (97)

**Credit cards:** Visa, MC, AmEx, Discover

**ABC permits:** All

**Appetizers:** \$5.95 to \$8.95

**Salads:** \$5.95 to \$10.95

**Soups:** \$3.25/cup or \$4.50/bowl

**Entrees:** \$10.95 to \$22.95

**Desserts:** \$1.50 to \$5.95

**Theme:** Casual fine dining

**Handicapped accessibility:** Most seating on entry level; two sections require a stair climb.

**Kid friendly:** Children's menu not available, but accommodations will be made.

with angel hair pasta; South Beach (\$17.95), scallops, artichoke hearts, and roasted red peppers in Parmesan cream sauce over angel hair pasta; and Salsiccia (\$12.95), veal sausage, made in-house, with roasted red peppers and onions in Parmesan cream or spicy marinara sauce in a bed of fettuccine. That sausage is also available as my favorite starter (\$6.95). My wife would add Lasagna (\$12.95) to this list.

**Healthy choices:** Identified on menu; all dietary restrictions can be accommodated.

**Most recent visit:** Oct. 18

From the grill include: Herb Grilled Chicken Breast (\$12.95), consistently moist and tender, accented with a light basil pesto cream sauce; Angus Filet (\$22.95), exuding solid beef flavor from tender texture; and Almond Crusted Salmon (\$17.95), wild caught. Unless you specify otherwise, these are joined on the plate by a blend of fresh zucchini, squash, carrots and onions sprinkled with dried herbs, and rice.

Even when I am reviewing and have dinner somewhere else, if weight permits, I drop in for Cheesecake (\$4.50) made by Ray's mother, Margaret, from a ricotta-based recipe. It's my favorite version.

Cafe Pasta and Grille does quite a bit of catering off-site, and there is an upstairs dining room that is available (at no charge) for large parties. I have attended several parties in each venue and found the food and service commendable.

My wife and I go here as often as schedule permits.

*John Batchelor is a freelance contributor who has been reviewing restaurants for more than 25 years. You can reach him at P.O. Box 20848, Greensboro, NC 27420, or send e-mail to [john.e.batchelor@gmail.com](mailto:john.e.batchelor@gmail.com). To find his recent columns, visit [GoTriad.com](http://GoTriad.com).*

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