

## Fantastic Italian fare in a mall, of all places

By: [Patricia Unterman](#) | 09/29/11 7:30 PM

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The last place I would expect to find an extraordinary meal is on the fourth floor of a shopping mall. But, what do I know? I've only written about 2,000 restaurant reviews.

Imagine my astonishment at discovering Cupola Pizzeria, a new addition to the "Restaurant Collection" in the Westfield Centre, under the old Emporium glass dome.

This unnoticed, cavelike space at the top of an escalator currently ranks as one of my favorite eateries in the Bay Area. Really.

Cupola Pizzeria is the creation of Adrian Hoffman, a brainy, sensual, European-trained, local-minded cook with a philosophy degree. He transformed One Market for the Lark Creek Group after Brad Ogden left.

For Cupola Pizzeria, he imported a tiled, dome-shaped, almond wood-burning pizza oven from Naples, and created a sophisticated, oven-focused menu that uses plenty of farmers' market produce.

Rarely have I had a meal in which every dish was perfect. That happened one Sunday afternoon, starting with the sharable Cupola "dome" salad (\$13.75), a play on a traditional Italian bread and tomato salad called panzanella.

This one tasted like my garden, full of thin, crunchy, multicolored disks of carrot, fennel, peppers, basil and mint, moistened by a tomato vinaigrette, molded in a bowl and then inverted on a plate.

Pizza margherita (\$13.50) was the real thing, a thin, crisp yet elastic crust, pooled with buffalo mozzarella, dabbed with tomato sauce, drizzled with olive oil, dotted with basil leaves and seasoned with smoke. It could not have been tastier.

The roast of the day (\$21.50), fork-tender pork, smothered in a ragout of roasted peppers and small tomatoes, fresh shelling beans and intense Sicilian olives, all melded in the sexiest way, bathed in ultra flavorful juices.

House-made spumoni (\$6.75), turned out to be pistachio ice cream rife with salted toasted pistachios, amarone cherries, bits of bitter chocolate, a red wine cherry sauce and a soft pouf of sweetened whipped cream.

Top-flight Italian wines by the glass, in perfect condition, made everything taste even better.



GARDEN FRESH: THE DOME SALAD DELICIOUSLY COMBINES BREAD, CARROT, FENNEL, PEPPERS, BASIL AND MINT. (BRIAN MOLYNEAUX/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER)

Garden fresh: The dome salad deliciously combines bread, carrot, fennel, peppers, basil and mint. (Brian Molyneaux/Special to The Examiner)

Could this have been a fluke? On the next visit four adults and two little girls, who immediately were handed crayons and blank menus to decorate, had a similarly remarkable meal. Furnished with long, communal tables, Cupola encourages family-style dining.

We spread toasts with warm, pulled-to-order mozzarella (\$11.75) slathered with olive oil and tiny roasted cherry tomatoes, irresistible to everyone.

A butter lettuce salad (\$9/\$13) in vibrant vinaigrette, showered with three kinds of shaved radish and a grated aged goat cheese, was a model of what a salad can be.

Carne pizza (\$16.50), starring Cupola's super-thin, crunchy-chewy crust, was judiciously topped with paper-thin slices of perfumed salami that crisped in the oven, bits of house-made sausage and sweet, fire-licked onions.

Spare but balanced, and huge in flavor, this pizza was a miracle. So was zucca pizza (\$15.50), paved with shaved zucchini rounds, zucchini flowers, mascarpone and a pesto of almonds, mint and salty dried cheese. Who knew a squash pizza could be so eloquent?

As I rode the escalator down afterward, I plotted my return. Yes, I really did need to look for some larger pants for fall. Now Cupola's location seemed ever so convenient.

*Patricia Unterman is the author of many editions of the "San Francisco Food Lovers' Guide." Contact her at [pattiu@concentric.net](mailto:pattiu@concentric.net).*

## **Cupola Pizzeria**

**Location:** Westfield Centre, fourth floor, 845 Market St., San Francisco

**Contact:** (415) 896-5600; [www.cupolasf.com](http://www.cupolasf.com)

**Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily

**Price range:** Starters \$9 to \$11.75; pizza \$11 to \$16.75; pasta and main course \$11.50 to \$21.50

**Recommended dishes:** Cupola "dome" salad, butter leaf salad, pulled to order mozzarella, roasted pork shoulder with shelling beans, margherita pizza, zucca pizza, carne pizza, spumoni

**Credit cards:** All major

**Reservations:** Accepted

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