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## Restaurant review: Lucia (5 stars)



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Sardines with parsley, fennel and radish at Lucia. The Bishop Arts restaurant has been open for nine weeks.

1 of 4 

By LESLIE BRENNER

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Crudo of Cotuit oysters with a Meyer lemon mignonette, or crostini with nduja and soft-scrambled egg? Baby artichoke salad with farro, arugula and Parmigiano-Reggiano, or baccalà fritters with an olive salad and aioli?

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They're all so enticing, but we can't order *everything*. After all, we're just four people.

months

That's our quandary as my friends and I contemplate the antipasti at Lucia, chef David Uygur's 2-month-old restaurant in Oak Cliff's Bishop Arts District. We go for the artichoke salad, the crostini, a cauliflower soup and a cheese board.

So what if we don't get to taste the crudo and the baccalà fritters: I'll order them next time I come. Right? Wrong! When I return less than three weeks later, the menu is completely different, and they're gone.

Uygur, the 37-year old chef who headed up the kitchen at Lola until it closed in November 2009, is so super-charged creatively that he's not content to keep making the same dishes over and over again. His menu at Lucia is an ever-changing romp through whatever he's excited about cooking.

Those crostini, four shingles of grilled house-made rustic Italian bread topped with clouds of extravagantly soft egg curds and slabs of lightly spicy sausage, make me weak in the knees. The nduja is a spicy, soft pork sausage that's traditional in Calabria; Uygur makes his there at Lucia, along with the rest of the salumi on offer. How nice to pair it with the egg, which soothes the spice. And then there's the egg itself, cooked slowly, with spoonfuls of soft butter and cream added now and then as it cooks, along with lemon and chives. It must be cooked with supreme care — that's the only way to achieve that creamy softness. It takes some pretty serious technique, plus time and patience, to transform such humble ingredients as flour, egg and assorted pork parts into something that delicious.

I'd love to stop in, share that with a friend, then have a plate of pasta as a main course — something like the whole-wheat bigoli, a handmade spaghetti-like pasta with terrific texture, and tossed lately with a ragu of milk-braised Berkshire pork cheeks and earthy hedgehog mushrooms. The key point in my fantasy is that I won't share the pasta. It's all for me, a full order. With it I sip a glass of 2007 Arnaldo-Caprai [Montefalco Rosso](#). Please don't wake me.

As it is, my friends and I — we're parties of four each time — order four antipasti, four half-orders of pasta, four secondi and four dolci, and share everything. It's wonderful to be able to taste so many things, especially because of the perspective it affords on Lucia's menu. But it leaves me longing to dine there purely for pleasure, and luxuriate in a big, selfish plate of, well, just about anything.

Among the antipasti, there's an incredible range of tastes, textures and temperatures. How did Uygur achieve such profound flavor in his preternaturally silky and smooth cauliflower soup? A pretty garnish of chopped almonds, plumped golden raisins and capers floats on top — the combination sounds odd, but it sings. Then there's the artichoke salad, which I expected to involve raw, shaved artichokes. Instead it stars tiny baby artichoke hearts: With a delicate flavor, they've been gently braised to perfect tenderness. They dance on the plate with lightly dressed arugula, grains of earthy farro and shavings of Parmigiano-Reggiano. Clearly some thought went into the cheese plate, wedges of creamy Gorgonzola dolce in peak condition, mushroomy Robiola and salty pecorino, all complimented brightly by a spoonful of kumquat mostarda that's especially good with the Gorgonzola.

The brilliance of Uygur's small menus, usually eight or nine antipasti, five primi, four secondi and four dolci, is that you can randomly make selections in each section, and you'll get that kind of palate-opening range. Another night we're wowed by lightly pickled fillets of Portuguese sardines topped with radish slices, parsley and shaved fennel, and a lightly spicy stew of borlotti beans, pancetta and incredibly tender tripe. When we're done sopping up the sauce with crusty pieces of bread, believe me, that bowl is clean.

Among the pastas, all of which are handmade, I loved a big, soft raviolone that oozed with egg yolk when you cut into it; escarole added a gently bitter edge, and it swam in a bit of brodo enriched with Parmigiano and butter. Fazzoletti — big, floppy handkerchiefs of pasta — came in a sauce of short ribs braised to the point of falling apart and dabbed with soft, creamy, cow's milk Crescenza cheese from Bellwether Farms in California's [Sonoma County](#); bits of fresh horseradish bridged the flavors smartly.

Uygur goes for lightness and purity of flavor when it comes to risotto, eschewing rich flavors and cheese in favor of treats more oceanic — buttery sea urchin or delicate, sweet chunks of lobster, both brightened with chives.

What you might not get is beef among the main courses — a pretty brave move on Uygur's part, in this town.

Fish, you can probably count on, maybe a meaty chunk of silver hake resting on velvety celery-root

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purée with a lovely little celery salad to set it off, or gently poached wild striped bass. Uygur has a way with duck — rosy slices of breast, maybe, with braised green lentils studded with green apple. And gorgeous bone-in veal chops have made repeat appearances, cut thick, seared right, absolutely captivating with nutty brown-butter sauce, cipollini onions and guanciale (cured pork jowl).

If you're religious, you might pray for rabbit: A braised leg, meaty and supremely tender, served over rustic, buckwheat-enriched polenta taragna and garnished with a few slim carrots and tiny halved Brussels sprouts, was one of the best things I've eaten in ages. Uygur turned the braising liquid into a sauce, light, white winey and herbal, fantastic.

All of this happens in a tiny, 36-seat trattoria with a funky pressed-tin ceiling, white tiles and transom windows. The feeling is relaxed; you almost feel like you're eating in someone's home, maybe a New York or [San Francisco](#) apartment. On one wall is a vintage Barilla pasta poster, shelves holding books, jars of mostardas and Uygur's marble mortar and pestle. Uygur's wife and co-owner, Jennifer, suffuses the dining room with warmth and thoughtful advice on her well-chosen, two-page, reasonably priced mostly Italian wine list. Tables get booked weeks in advance, but Jennifer keeps the four seats at a counter looking into the kitchen available for lucky walk-ins.

The service is relaxed, too, but it's super attentive. Each time I've dined there I've had the same server, a gentleman I remember from Lola; he's clearly excited about what's going on in the kitchen and does an excellent job describing the dishes. His attention to the details of service matches the attention to detail on the plates — wine glasses are poured to the proper level and kept filled, extra plates are brought for sharing; we never run out of that fabulous bread, though we can't stop eating it. The pacing is perfect.

So yes, dessert lands exactly when we're ready for it; Uygur takes charge of the sweet side himself. His dolci are as wonderful as everything else, and they sing in the same key: homey and pitch-perfect, as in crisp cannoli filled with sweet, house-made ricotta. I don't usually love milk chocolate, but I could spend the rest of my life with the trembly milk chocolate panna cotta, topped with dollops of dark chocolate budino and lightly sweet whipped cream and decorated with candied orange zest and cocoa nibs. Lately I've loved a brown-butter gelato harboring a treasure of poached pears, prunes and apples, with a crunch of toasted hazelnuts.

Just thinking about Lucia makes me happy. Walking in always feels like an adventure — what surprises will the menu hold? What kind of journey will our palates take? Yet Uygur's cooking, from soup to nuts, is above all about deliciousness.

It's amazing that after being open just over two months, Lucia, as fun and unpretentious as it is, has already scaled such heights. Chalk it up to Uygur's vision, artistry, technique and incredible talent, along with the warm hospitality of the dining room: This is a restaurant that's truly extraordinary.

## Lucia (5 stars)

Price: \$\$\$ (antipasti \$8 to \$21, primi \$12 to \$20, secondi \$26 to \$29, desserts \$7 to \$8)

Service: Warm, attentive, enthusiastic and helpful

Ambience: A tiny trattoria in a Bishop Arts storefront that offers such warm hospitality that you feel you're dining in a friend's home. The restaurant cannot accommodate parties larger than six.

Location: 408 W. Eighth St., Dallas; 214-948-4998; [www.luciadallas.com](http://www.luciadallas.com)

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 5:30 to 10 p.m.

Credit cards: American Express, MC, V

Wheelchair accessible: Yes

Smoking area: None

Alcohol: Wine and beer only. A well-chosen two-page list of reasonably priced, mostly Italian vintages offers some nice surprises.

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32 comments		Sort: Newest to Oldest			
	<p><a href="#">rubbercow</a> Score: 0</p> <p>10:53 AM on 3/1/2011</p> <p>We took our daughter and her boyfriend there back in January and I have to say that it was the best meal I have had in many years. The food, setting, service and ambiance were all perfect. I do a great deal of traveling and eat at very many excellent restaurants while entertaining clients and our meal at Lucia was a total stand out.</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">buckeyes57</a> Score: 0</p> <p>5:09 PM on 2/28/2011</p> <p>We've eaten there once so far and it was very good. The bread and olives placed at the table when you sit down are the perfect beginning to a great evening. You are never rushed as you feel in some restaurants. We did a lot of plate sharing which was encouraged. We were able to try something from each others plate and it seems like they encourage this. The beef tongue was so good. Can't wait to go back. They really do make you feel very welcome and it is a very intimate setting.</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">Jack in Oak Lawn</a> Score: -4</p> <p>3:59 PM on 2/28/2011</p> <p>Leslie, Did you forget that you were in Texas? I know that you are a professional. I know that you know what taste good. However, Crudo of Cotuit? Meyer Lemon mignonette? Farro? Baccala fritters? Please. Jack Evans</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">SRD</a> Score: 3</p> <p>2:21 PM on 2/25/2011</p> <p>We got in last night by the grace of god. In fact we sat in a little table outside and it was very pleasant. The people who the front of the house are lovely, warm and charming. The chef is terrific and yes, the food is as good as everyone says. It is not over priced and the wine list is small but there are some nice choices designed to complement the food. Christy and I rarley have a spat but when we split that canoli dessert, there was a little problem about who got that last bite.</p> <p>What a great evening. Thanks.</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">Epicurus</a> Score: 1</p> <p>1:19 PM on 2/25/2011</p> <p>Where were all you people when Lola went down?</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">kateao</a> Score: 3</p> <p>12:38 PM on 2/25/2011</p> <p>Eating at Lucia was practically a religious experience for my husband and I. We've eaten there twice now, and each time has been superb. I think that this is the best restaurant in Dallas, and I applaud the Uygur's for setting the bar so high. Bishop Arts is the epitome of perfect urban living, and we welcome Lucia.</p>				Report Abuse
	<p><a href="#">Hank Rossi</a> Score: 2</p>				

 <p>12:02 PM on 2/25/2011</p> <p>I agree, as close to authentic Italian as we have in Texas. It makes up for the loss of York Street. We still want you back, Sharon and Hana. Dave and Jennifer best wishes and continued success, you deserve it. can't wait foy oyu to start serving lunch.</p>	Report Abuse
 <p><a href="#">El Jefe Gordo</a> Score: 0</p> <p>9:29 AM on 2/25/2011</p> <p>I look forward to dining at Lucia.</p> <p>On a side note.... I still can't get over Ms. Brenner giving The French Room 3 stars. Makes me question her sincerity in her reviews.</p> <p> <a href="#">1 reply</a></p>	   Report Abuse
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