

DINING

RESTAURANT REVIEWS AND GOINGS-ON

PIZZA'S THE STAR AT SUTTON'S

Some other menu offerings need a little work, but the flatbread pie is as good as it gets

By Wendy Miller

Contributing Restaurant Critic

The walls of Sutton's long dining room are festooned with gangster-era posters and newspaper copy. There is a small, adjacent pub area that does little to hide its intimate sports-bar soul, and an attractive patio that could (almost) make you forget it's in a parking lot.

The fare, delivered with great service, is resolutely Italian-American. The pub persona seems to be a culinary concession to die-hard burger and fries lovers, but the restaurant's real bragging rights go to the flatbread pizza of their family ancestors.

And that pride is justified, because Sutton's pizza is the highlight of the menu and currently among my favorite pies in town.

Size is scaled to adults (1 square foot) or to children (6 inches square). Whichever you choose or however it's topped — from modestly with cheese to full-bore with slightly spicy homemade fennel sausage, peppers, onions and mushrooms — the supple crust with its glaze of marinara sauce and the slightly crisp edges makes for a heavenly rendition of one of America's favorite foods.

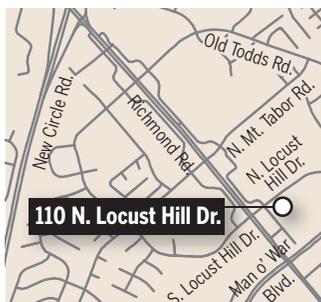
Not that there is anything shabby about the appetizer of tender meatballs with minced garlic throughout. They would have been even better in the marinara rather than what resembled chunky stewed tomatoes.

And what's not to love about the plump mushroom appetizer? One of the owners comes from generations of mushroom farmers and clearly knows how to select and prepare the caps for this starter overflowing with sausage. The flavor and texture were such a satisfying combination that they rendered the light cream sauce drizzled on top totally unnecessary.



PHOTOS BY MATT GOINS

One of the best things about Sutton's is its oven-fired flatbread pizza. The deluxe is \$10.99.



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Sutton's salad course, though, ranks with that of most other restaurants: nice try, but unimpressive. This "Italian chef salad" was essentially lettuce tossed with antipasto: iceberg with strips of smoked meats, shredded cheese, peppers and green olives. The house dressing, homemade

blue cheese vinaigrette, tasted bottled. Given how easy it is to make a great salad, I sometimes despair.

The turf and surf I sampled left me wanting more pizza.

The "Tuscan rib-eye" steak, for example, seemed inspired by *bistecca alla fiorentina*, that is, marinated in oil, garlic and aromatics. It arrived precisely medium rare, but the meat was still chewy; because the relatively thin cut hadn't rested, lots of juice got



Stuffed mushrooms (\$7.99) are filled with Italian sausage, spinach and fresh herbs, then baked and covered with light cream.



The homemade meatballs are available as an appetizer for \$7.99 or served with pasta as an entree for \$11.99.

would prefer faultless execution right out of the kitchen, but it's better for a restaurant to err on the side of restraint, and splurge by giving customers some fabulous flaky sea salt for the table.

I was really most disappointed in Sutton's fra diavolo, a spicy tomato-seafood dish of suspected American origin and myriad interpretations, sometimes served with pasta. In this version, the angel hair's texture reminded me of ramen noodles bathed in a sauce resembling cream of tomato soup; the tough grilled shrimp and conversely succulent scallops, served on skewers, got no spicy sauce at all, and were tough to remove in the bargain.

But then came the redemptive power of dessert, a melt-in-your-mouth bread pudding, made from scratch. The custard soaked into the bread, the caramel sauce merely whispered with Maker's Mark, and the scoop of vanilla ice cream was enormous.

The seductive fantasy of living on pizza alone notwithstanding, it's a pleasure to begin and end a full meal on such positive notes. Now all that's needed is some attention to the courses in between for Sutton's to be singing in culinary harmony.

Wendy Miller is a Lexington-based food and spirits writer and critic.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Sutton's

Where: 110 N. Locust Hill Dr.

Phone: (859) 268-2068

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 a.m. Mon.-Thu.; 11 a.m.-3 a.m. Fri., Sat.; 11 a.m.-midnight Sun. Happy hours: 2-6 p.m., 10 p.m.-3 a.m.

Other: Full bar. Parking lot. Vegetarian options. Child-friendly. Live music. Appetizers \$6.99-\$9.99, salads \$5.99-\$8.99, soups \$3.99, sandwiches and hamburgers \$6.99-\$9.99, pizzas \$6.99-\$10.99, pastas \$10.99-\$13.99, entrees \$9.99-\$15.99, desserts \$3.99-\$5.99.

Online: Suttonsrestaurant.com

lost the minute the knife went in. A side of broccoli was bright emerald and just toothy enough — not too crunchy and not boiled lifeless — and the baked potato fluffy was without being mealy.

My major complaint, however, was the heavy hand with salt — an irreversible misstep. One obviously