

# Between Meals

by Michael Bauer

## For great desserts, think Italian



The honey pistachio semifreddo at Flour+Water is a memorable Italian dessert

From a reader, reflecting on my dessert post more than a week ago:

*I'm still thinking about your post on desserts. I'm curious what you think about the desserts at A16 and Perbacco. As you know, desserts are not a big part of the Italian meal and most often consist of fruit and cheese, maybe biscotti, with the exception of special occasions.*

It's ironic that some of the most memorable desserts I've had have been at Italian restaurants. Maybe it's because the desserts at many Italian restaurants have a focus, or maybe it's because these places actually employ a talented pastry chef.

At A16, Jane Tseng creates a chocolate budino tart that would go to the top of any chocolate lovers list. The crust is great, and the chocolate is enhanced with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and white flecks of sea salt. She also does an exceptional fruit crostata with ricotta gelato, and a bitter almond semifreddo with nectarines and apricots. She gently pushes into the trend of offering savory items at the end of the meal with such things as her puff pastry with pecorino cream, blackberries and black pepper.

Perbacco's, Sarah Ballard makes a butterscotch budino with chocolate ganache, an apricot crostata with basil gelato and amazing Brutti ma Buoni "ugly but good" hazelnut meringue cookies.

Just recently I also had three exceptional desserts created by chef Thomas McNaughton at the new Flour+Water. I love his chocolate budino, which is served in a bowl and has the texture of rich ganache; the honey pistachio semifreddo with poached cherries; and olive oil cake with strawberries and candied fennel.

Im also fond of desserts from Laura Matis at Osteria Stellina in Point Reyes Station. There's the gingersnap-Meyer lemon ice cream sandwiches, where the spicy cookies play off the cool ice cream; a coffee cardamom pot de creme with toasted almond praline; and a flourless chocolate cake, which is like a rich fudge bar with cacao nibs, whipped cream and caramel creme fraiche.

And I can't forget the buttermilk panna cotta at Delfina. I could mention others, but you get the idea.

All these desserts have a familiar ring, but the chefs or pastry chefs are able to gently tinker with the formulas, make them their own, and make me want more.

Posted By: Michael Bauer (Email) | July 15 2009 at 05:05 AM