



## At Piccino, Small is Beautiful

BY JEANNE STORCK

When Piccino, a sliver of a café, opened two years ago on a quiet corner in Dogpatch, the sleepy streets of this industrial neighborhood got a much-needed jolt. The Italian espresso machines hummed to life and suddenly local artists and business workers had the perfect pocket-sized place to stop for a wake-up cup of Blue Bottle or an after-work dinner of thin crust pizza and wine.

With a handful of tables and a few seats at the bar, room was tight, but brimming with style — blonde wood floors, fire engine red chairs, burnished copper-topped tables and lots of light. Owners Sheryl Rogat and Italian-born Margherita Sagan, both first time restaurateurs, liked the idea of starting small. Rogat brought pizza savvy from a stint at Pizzetta 211 while Sagan brought coffee smarts — her husband, architect Loring Sagan, runs the Hayes Valley Blue Bottle kiosk. This summer a renovation moved the coffee bar three doors down and the café, though still “piccino,” now fits ten tables.

Before Piccino, Rogat had dreamed of opening a small food hall that showcased local growers — “a farmers market, but simpler,” she explains. Today the café embodies this vision. Rogat and Logan craft dishes from a “Who’s Who” of Bay Area organic producers, keeping the emphasis on fresh and simple. “We want the ingredients to speak for themselves so we do very little to them,” Sagan asserts. Salads and small plates complement a mix of classic and seasonal pizzas.

When we visit on a crisp fall evening, autumn flavors fill the menu. A rapini salad (\$9.50) swims with little jewels of pumpkin, bacon and curls of caramelized onion and arrives atop a Zen-like glazed clay plate created by Sagan’s husband. For pizza, we try the roasted butternut squash with radicchio, balsamic and



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Gorgonzola (\$13.50). And we melt for a thin crust (that's crisp, but not too) crowned by a little forest of roasted beech mushrooms, crimini mushroom pesto and crescenza cheese. A brioche tart (\$6.00) topped with custard and the apple-y perfume of stewed quince supplies a perfect earthy finish.

"Piccino has become the center of a little community and we're honored by that," enthuse Rogat and Sagan. "It's much more than we ever expected. We've got great customers who aren't just regulars, they're fans." For the past year, these fans have been flocking to Piccino for special dining events where food rock stars like Marin Sun, Fatted Calf and Mariquita preside over meals themed around their product. In November, Far West Fungi hosted a mushroom-inspired dinner complete with a mini lesson in mycology while Hog Island set up shucking stalls one Sunday afternoon and dished up fresh oysters. In the works are a roasting fest with Thomas Odermatt from RoliRotie in February and special menu concocted by chocolatier Michael Recchiuti in March. Rogat advises people to sign up early since space is limited — or shall we say small and cozy. That after all is Piccino's charm. 🍷