

The right combination

GRAHAM REID's faith in pizza parlours is restored with a memorable meal

REMARKABLE, ISN'T it, what can come out of a modest-looking kitchen? On Waiheke recently for one of those getaway long weekends, we ambled in to a place in Oneroa for lunch and ordered a pizza with mushrooms, ham and capsicum.

What came out of the kitchen looked interesting enough but tasted utterly bland. We were quite taken aback at how little taste the thing had.

Which made it surprising that the following night we decided to chance our hand at another place renowned for its pizza and pasta. But *Stefanos* in Surfdale had come highly recommended by friends on the mainland, and the woman at our hotel rolled her eyes longingly at the thought of *Stefanos'* pizzas and its pistachio gelato.

Still smarting slightly, however, from the earlier experience, we got up the courage and went to what looked like a takeaway which had outgrown itself by popular demand.

It was the wet night of a big rugby game but the place was busy and there was a steady thread of people arriving for large boxes of takeaways, especially just around what we assumed to be half-time.

Despite the kitchen working in overdrive, we were given a cheery greeting, seated in the front area (there was a large open-air part covered in plastic sheeting for the more hardy souls) and had time to take in the photos of Venice, the mural and the busy kitchen.

Stefanos struck us immediately as a bit familiar and folksy — and the kind of place that could surprise, as it did. This time in a good way.

The wine list was good — but why not have chianti? — and the handsome antipasto didn't scrimp on my favourites, prosciutto (or proscutto as they had it on the takeaway menu) or capers (cappers?).

This was an excellent opener and from the long list of pizza options the thin-crust treats which followed were terrific.

We might have had to ask three times for water but this wasn't a silver service place and they were flat out, so we were forgiving, as you should be.



SPOILED FOR CHOICE: Stefanos' antipasto platter.

PICTURE / DEAN PURCELL

My frutti di mare pizza was just the right side of tart and chock-full of thick salmon pieces and scallops, and Megan's vegetarian special — with artichokes,

capers, olives and more — lived up to its name.

These were served on heated tiles (hot, actually, be warned) and judging by the mood of those arriving at half-time, our team was beating someone. The rugby watchers were almost as cheerful as the mood in *Stefanos*.

Locals doubtless know *Stefanos* well but I doubt they have exhausted the menu, which spoils you for choice in pizza/pasta options.

I had another glass of chianti, Megan devoured a pistachio gelato, which was as good as the woman at our hotel had said it would be, and *Stefanos* erased — almost — the memory of that other place we had endured the previous afternoon.

Yes, it is remarkable what can come out of a modest-looking kitchen. □

WHERE: Surfdale, Waiheke

Ph 372 5309

OUR MEAL: \$110 for antipasto, two pizzas, dessert, three glasses of wine

OUR WINE: Functional and usefully broad. And a decent Italian chianti by the glass.

VERDICT: Casual atmosphere and reliable food make a fine combination.

OUT OF 10

FOOD: 8 SERVICE: 6

VALUE: 8 AMBIENCE: 7

and access



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