

able talk

TIM PAWS

Spotless corner cafe a gem

Caffe Florian
Main Floor
510 West Hastings St.
682-7759

Odrove past Caffe Florian at the corner of Richards and Hastings at least a couple of times before I realized it was a restaurant.

It's an easy thing to do, considering that the soaring, two storey ceiling and tasteful pale green decor have more the air of a high-end European jewelry store than a corner cafe.

In a world that seems destined to be taken over by could-care-less cappuccino bars and increasing mediocrity spawned by a fastfood-trained public, Caffe Florian really is a gem. Possibly the most stunning of any corner cafe in town, the tongue-in-cheek Florentine decor reflects the adjoining lobby of its home, the Standard Building, with polished marble columns, mint and forest green accents, solid oak bar, and collection of fascinating sepia-tone prints of old Vancouver.

And fittingly, while the lobby's frieze sports an impressive array of clocks set in marble which tell you the time in New York, Tokyo, London or wherever, Florian boasts its own polished stone timepiece announcing "Venice Time."

Owner Riga Redavid has more than 10 years in the restaurant and catering business, including a stint as part-owner of Alfredo's (formerly at Burrard and Robson). The place is spotless, the atmosphere cheerful and unmistakably Italian. For my taste, this is the perfect haunt at which to linger over a coffee with the morning paper (provided), or enjoy a good, promptly served lunch, reasonably priced in delightfully decadent surroundings. The menu is straightforward and, while hardly extensive, is certainly adequate.

For snacks, there's a good selection of fresh pastries and "special treats" and a full range of cappuccino, latte, mocha, expresso (sic) and so on — excellent coffee, with a variety of flavours.

The menu's mainstay is sandwiches, made with very fresh (Calabria Bakery) breads, quickly prepared and elegantly served (with garnish). Prosciutto (lean and thinly sliced, and a



Caffe Florian owner Rita Redavid has created a spotless Italian restaurant that is perfect for a mid-morning or lunchtime diversion. Robert Klein photo

generous portion) is delicious, served in a herbed focaccia roll, with provolone cheese and tartly pickled mixed peppers. For more demanding appetites there is a daily pasta special, such as penne con gamberetti, a generous portion served with soup or salad for \$7.95, or \$4.90 for a half order.

Caffe Florian is open weekdays from 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., but has imminent plans to stay open until early evening, with an expanded menu and limited wine list.

For the moment, Caffe Florian makes for a very pleasant mid-morning or lunchtime diversion — especially for an increasingly appreciative business clientele. However, judging by the quality and surroundings, it could become a perfect choice for moderately-priced, pre-theatre dining, being, as it is, just a few blocks from the Q.E. Theatre.

There's considerable elation amongst the B.C. wine community these days over the initial success of the VQA program, which effectively screens and qualifies better B.C. wines for its seal of approval.

Since the program's introduction in late 1990, sales of B.C. wines have increased by a remarkable 50 per cent. The one winery to date which has had every wine submitted for tasting accepted is Gray Monk Cellars, one of the original and most widely respected of the Okanagan estate wineries. At a recent B.C. Club luncheon, co-hosted by newly appointed agents Vintage Consultants, Gray Monk released its 1990 vintage, sporting award-winning redesigned labelling.

Worth looking for in particular are a full bodied, Alsatian style Pinot Gris (118638; \$8.60), a pleasant, quite crisp and fruity Pinot Auxerrois (096222; \$8.30) and a delicate new rose, Rotberger (942508; \$8.95).

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Restaurant

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