



## NEW YORK CORNER

By John Mariani

### Caffè dei Fiori

973 Lexington Avenue (near 71st Street) 212-327-3400  
[caffedeifiorinewyork.com](http://caffedeifiorinewyork.com)

Those downtowners and Brooklynites who enjoy dising the restaurants on the Upper East Side of Manhattan have obviously never dined at Le Cirque, Daniel, Café Boulud, JoJo, The Mark, Orsay and other first-rate restaurants in that stretch of territory—and those are just the French brigade. Fine Italian restaurants also abound—Sandro’s, Sistina, Caravaggio, Saint Ambroeus, Petaluma, and, now, Caffè dei Fiori, recently opened by Daliso Gulmini and Andrea Nanni in a former three-level antiques store.

It’s a quirky lay-out, with a main dining room down a few steps, a wrought iron banister that leads to a tiny landing, and an intimate third level for a few tables, all with intensely colorful flowers and tablecloths, overlooking the Avenue. The chairs are beautifully upholstered. The façade’s window has a gaiety about it that draws you in from the street, where the owners graciously receive you and welcome you to their little labor of love.



Chef Giovanni Tenace is from Puglia, with long experience in Italy, London and Sydney, before he came to NYC to run his own pasta manufacturing company, and his knowledge of the process shows in some of the most delicate pastas around town.

Indeed, the pastas are where you’ll find dishes you will not elsewhere. Most of the rest of the menu toes a fairly standard line of New York-Italian favorites, including several dishes with salmon, which Italians rarely eat but which every chef in the city must have on the menu. The carpaccio of salmon with orange and fennel (\$22) is, however, delicious, the flavor of the salmon light. Beef carpaccio (\$22) is equally finessed, with a touch of Dijon mustard, Parmigiano, greens and the nice touch of almonds.

Grilled octopus (\$20) took on added flavors of eggplant, basil, Parmigiano and tomato sauce, while an unusual tartare of *ricciola* (amberjack) took on the richness of a vegetable *brunoise* and a

little soy sauce (\$23).

So, on to Mr. Tenace’s pastas, which include first-rate *risotti*, one done with baby artichoke hearts and prawns (\$28), another with black or white truffles (market price). Splendidly hearty for this winter is a dish of egg ravioli (*below*) with braised duck in a reduction of its juices (\$26, full portion), as well as an egg-rich housemade *tagliatelle* with beef *ragù* (\$27). Plump *tortelloni* (\$22) are stuffed with buffalo milk cheese ricotta and *cavolo nero* (kale).

Though very pricey at \$64, the Dover sole cooked in butter was wholly rewarding and so rich you might consider sharing one after the pastas. *Branzino* (\$38) is poached gently with herbs and emerges delicately flavorful. A veal chop *alla Milanese* (\$40) is as good as others around town, but more out of the ordinary is a terrine of chicken wrapped in prosciutto, leeks and fontina cheese (\$26). The lamb chops listed are from New Zealand, therefore most probably frozen, which is off-putting from the quality of everything else.

Desserts are well worth ordering, notably a satiny pear tart with sorbet (\$12) and a mousse of bitter chocolate with whipped cream (\$12).

The wine list at Caffè dei Fiori is substantial and well priced in every category.

By the way, though I have not tried it, the brunch menu offers a number of dishes not found everywhere else, including crêpes with tomato sauce, mushrooms, and prosciutto (\$20), a frittata of zucchini with taleggio cheese (\$18), and tiny meatballs of pork with grilled potato scones (\$18).

Caffè dei Fiori is a charming new addition to the Upper East Side, already winning the neighborhood crowd but deserving of a visit from all those who so rarely venture north of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.

*Caffè dei Fiori is open for lunch Mon.-Fri. dinner nightly, brunch on weekends*

