

# A real taste of Italy in Ranelagh

## Pinocchio

Luas kiosk, Ranelagh Road, Dublin 6  
Tel 01-4970111

**Chef: Marco Roccasalvo**

**T**he 1960s and 70s were all about French classical cooking. Thanks to its popularisation by the American chef Julia Child, and the haute cuisine produced by the Roux brothers in Le Gavroche in London, French cooking became the lingua franca of the foodie world.

This meant that the simple style of Italian cooking was often sidelined. How things have changed.

As the convoluted gymnastics of haute cuisine was hijacked by the mass-market and twisted to hide poor sourcing and poor ingredients, Italianophiles happily munched in style. Their cooking had always been about purity and 'terroir' (there's a French word again). But a growing interest in quality sourcing and even 'assembling' food rather than cooking has seen a justifiable renaissance of Italian cuisine.

Jamie Oliver has helped, as have the likes of Mick Wallace's eateries in Dublin and, more recently, the entrepreneurial team of Marco Giannantonio, Maurizio Mastangelo and Marco Roccasalvo, who run an Italian cookery school, a foodie travel business, a catering company and the popular Bray res-

## Food

Reviewed by  
**Ross Golden  
Bannon**



restaurant Campo de' Fiori.

The most recent addition to their portfolio is Pinocchio in Ranelagh. But can standards be maintained as the business expands?

Pinocchio has a fairly inauspicious location in a kiosk space under the Luas station. However, it has been given a smart fit-out and, using dark woods and clever track lighting, retains a little homely feel in what is a modern space.

The staff are super cheery, but – as is so often the case with foreign wait staff – we experienced the usual struggle for menu explanations delivered in tortured English. But we got there in the end.

Here's a tip for Italians living in Dublin: if you want to learn English, hang out with English speakers. When I was in France, I employed a similar policy and it worked wonders for my French. My Irish friends hated me of course but, c'est la vie (as they don't say in France).

For starters in Pinocchio, I had misto salumi e formaggi (€16) which was an extraordinarily large plate of smoky salami, bresaola,

### Watching the pennies

**Starter:** salmone marinato, smoked salmon with mandarin olive oil €9.45

**Main course:** rigatoni alla amatriciana, rigatoni with pancetta, onion and cherry tomato €14.50

**Dessert:** plain cookies 25c each

**Wine:** Spinalli Merlot €11.50

**Dinner for two:** €59.90

### Breaking the bank

**Starter:** gran misto di mare, mixed fried seafood €16

**Main course:** tonno alla griglia con vongole e cozze, grilled tuna with clams and mussels, €24.50

**Dessert:** tiramisu €4.50

**Wine:** Brancaia, Super Tuscan €75

**Dinner for two:** €165

### Tomás Clancy rates the wine list

There are 62 interesting wines on this list, all of them Italian. Unfamiliar nuggets to be explored include the superb Sella & Mosca Tanca Farra DOC 2002 from Sardinia at €34.50, and the meaty Regaleali Rosso IGT Sicilia 2004 at €28.80.

There are heavy hitters like Fattoria dei Barbi's Brunello di Montalcino DOCG 2000 at a hefty €66, and crowd pleasers such as the Leone de

Castris's Villa Larena Primitivo del Salento IGT 2004 at €27.90.

The star of the list is probably the Santa Sofia Gioe Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2004 at €69.50, expensive but an awful lot of wine for the money.

Best value is the excellent reserve Vernaccia di S.Gimignano Ori DOCG 2004 at €33.20.

**Rating: \*\*\***

mortadella, pecorino, black olives, grilled aubergines, preserved artichokes, pickled button mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes and what seemed like preserved pioppino mushrooms.

Sun-dried tomatoes were my staple food in the recession of 1980s London, because a small jar of poor quality examples could make the stalest of bread sing. Pinocchio's did not bring me back to those grim days but instead transported me to

the taste of sunshine.

This was the hallmark of my starter – simple style and high quality. My only complaint would be the portion size, which was for two people. There was little else on offer that would suit a single diner.

For the main course I had the simple spaghetti alle vongole (€16.90). Quality olive oil, al dente pasta and a streak of saline from the shells combined to turn this into an unfussy delight as I ferreted out

the small bits of clam meat from the little shells.

This is the sort of dish all of us think we'd like to make at home, but never get around to. I don't think I'll bother, now that I've eaten it here.

Desserts feature all sorts of classics such as panna cotta (€3.50) and caramel tiramisu (€4.50). I took away a plain little cookie which I had with coffee, and quietly mused on how the most ordinary ingredients had combined to something unique in the hands of a professional.

The bill for one came to €40.40 which included a glass of chianti (€5.50). In truth, two courses are too much for one person and I suppose I was trying to ram a western European eating model on a casual Italian dining style, so it's possible to enjoy a meal here for a lot less.

Like so many restaurants in Ireland, the staff are the last thing on the owner's minds. Many restaurant owner and managers confuse friendliness with good service and fail to create proper working systems.

This impacts badly on customers, and it's about time the industry regulators started insisting on basic training skills for the success of the food service industry.

So why call a restaurant after an Italian fairytale puppet famed for lying? Well, Pinocchio was famous for something else too. He didn't want to be a wooden imitation – he wanted to be the real thing. And the food here is certainly that.