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Leone's rooftop dining offers a nice view of Norfolk's downtown

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Paccheri alle Vongole - paccheri pasta, clams, wine, garlic and fresh herbs at Leone's Italian, photographed Friday, May 5, 2017.



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Veal Chop Saltimbocca - bone in rib chop, spinach, sage and prosciutto, caper demi, potato puree at Leone's Italian, photographed Friday, May 5, 2017.

I have waited a while for Leone's Italian on Granby Street to open. Since I noticed the rooftop being converted into a usable space, I have looked forward to dining alfresco on pleasant evenings. A while back I got the chance to visit with a friend, but that time we were in the inside dining room. Recently I finally got to enjoy a meal on the roof and provide a review of the experience.

Leone's aims to provide authentic Italian fine dining in downtown Norfolk. Its interior is beautiful. A clear glass water wall separates the bar area from main dining area. Polished concrete floors, exposed brick walls and muted color schemes provide a comfortable, sophisticated atmosphere. The rooftop area is just gorgeous. There is a cushioned lounge area in the middle, where folks can sit back, chat, drink and nibble. Along the sides are comfortable tables where you can look down to the street, or gaze off to the NEON District or Chrysler Hall. On the evening of our visit we watched a stream of kilted musicians headed away from the Tattoo, and the Tide making its rounds. This is my idea of downtown living.

We showed up in the early evening and were escorted to one of the rooftop tables lining the edges of the space. As the sun started to dip behind a neighboring building and a light evening breeze stirred, we ordered a bottle of rosé to start off the evening.

We began the meal with Carpaccio and Tartare of Beef (\$14.99). The thinly sliced beef was delicious, and the accompanying rounds of soft but firm bread provided a great base. The tartare fell short. Instead of chopped raw beef, it appeared to be seared ribeye, cut into chunks and mixed with onion and garlic. Tasty – but not what was expected. Caper berries were listed in the description, but there were none on the plate. Instead of plump, green fruits, with their stems still attached, the dish was adorned with tiny pickled caper flower buds. Also absent was any hint of the truffle oil listed on the menu.

Moving on to the pasta course, we ordered Amatriciana con Gamberi (\$21.99). Amatriciana is a traditional Italian sauce made with pork cheeks, tomato and pecorino cheese. Our version that evening had some very tasty shrimp added into the mix. I found the overall preparation wanting. Instead of the bucatini pasta's being coated with a somewhat thickened, and nicely married, set of flavors, the sauce was soupy and largely in the bottom of the bowl. The bucatini was a bit too soft for my liking.

For our main we had Bistecca alla Fiorentina (\$24.99). The traditional version is made with a thick porterhouse steak. Leone's version uses the ribeye cut without the bone. The steak was topped with a half tomato filled with spinach and Parmigiano cheese, then baked. It had a nice flavor, and with the grilled lemon, made a good pairing with the tasty steak.

We finished the meal with Leone's version of tiramisu (\$7.99) – a well-thought-out presentation with great flavors. Instead of the ladyfingers' being soaked with espresso, they were kept firm and arrayed in a martini glass, like the petals of a flower, sticking up from sweet mascarpone. The filling carried the coffee flavors and had a light dusting of chocolate. Whipped cream, slices of fresh strawberry, and mint leaves provided a final garnish. Very nice!

Service on the night of our visit was exceptional. Our waiter was friendly and attentive to our needs without overdoing it. He really made the evening pleasant. The pace of the meal was unhurried, and we enjoyed watching the sights of downtown Norfolk as each course arrived.

Leone's is a wonderful setting for a restaurant. The interior has a polished, refined atmosphere, and the rooftop is sure to be a popular place. The food preparation needs to come up to match both the location and the pricing. I hope this just reflects normal opening issues, and I look forward to enjoying more meals on the roof.