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Dining out: Put the right touch into dining at Passion8 Bistro  
Catherine Muccigrosso · The Herald  
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Catherine Muccigrosso

The dishes at Passion8 Bistro are served with flair and flavor. This column offers a sampling of dining experiences in the area. It is not intended as a review of the restaurant other than to provide the reader with one diner's experience. This week's restaurant is Passion8 Bistro.

### **Passion8 Bistro**

Location: 3415 S.C.. 51, Fort Mill

Hours: Lunch: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays.

Dinner: 5 to 10 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays and 5 to 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

Phone: 802-7455

Web site: [passion8bistro.com](http://passion8bistro.com)

Ambiance: Upscale but down-to-earth more than Italian restaurant

Not far from the Carowinds Boulevard exit off Interstate 77 is Passion8 Bistro, nestled on a curve near a patch of woods on S.C. 51. It stands alone as a mustard-yellow exterior stucco building that offers a warm welcome with plenty of parking and a walk through the cozy back patio set up with tables surrounded by private fencing that leads to entrance.

We were the first ones to arrive on this Friday night as soon as the doors opened for dinner. Greeted warmly, as if we were just dropping for dinner with friends, we decided to sit in the small private back room, rather than the main dining area with dark burgundy and brown walls with a bar and an elegant feel with long white table cloths and candlelight on every table. The back room that seats 12 (the entire restaurant seats 35) is covered in yellow gold walls with burgundy trim and elegant, rich curtains. It's a brighter room than the main room with a large window, but still very cozy.

Our waitress, Kelly — like the hostess who said “make yourself at home” — was down to earth, very friendly and helpful. We started off with cocktails from the long list of unique offerings

like Ruby Red Slippers, Spiced Pumpkin Ginger Pie, Orange Clover, Prickly Pear and Ginger Honey Happiness. My companion went bananas for his Banana's Foster with creme di banana, Myer's dark rum, bananas and touch of cream. I enjoyed sipping on my Italian Soda that included Amaretto Di Saronno, Kahlua and ginger. It was so refreshing.

There's also a nice wine list of Lovely Whites and Vibrant Reds from Italy, France, Germany, California, Africa, Argentina, and Spain sold by the glass (\$7 to \$12) or by the bottle (\$24 to \$108). A look at the wine selection and it's obvious our waitress wasn't kidding when she said this place has "more than Italian, it has global appeal."

That theme carries throughout the menu, which may be a short one page, but the chefs have it running the gamut of desired dishes with an appetizer, soups, salads, pasta, seafood like shrimp, beef like filet, lamb and specialty poultry like duck. While offerings of pasta selections, soups and salads are constant, we were told the menu changes seasonally and organic ingredients are used when possible.

A special treat was sent to the table (the kitchen ends every diner something to munch on while waiting; this time it was a French sampling with salmon in a bread. Even my companion who won't touch seafood loved it, much to his surprise.

We ordered a Sexy Caesar salad (\$7) to split, which was brought out in a unique presentation. The kitchen had split the salad for us, and although it didn't look like there would be much salad as the leaves stood wrapped and straight up, each plate was quite hefty and filling with cheese tuille, roasted red peppers and yellow sundrop tomatoes. Even the fresh bread in a basket brought to us was fresh and flavorful. I couldn't wait for our entrees.

In the spirit of adventure, my steak-loving companion tried for the first time Magrette De Canard (\$24), duck breast in vanilla rum sugo and boursin peach tart. I did the same, ordering Pan-Seared Chilean Seabass (\$27) in coconut lemongrass, lobster pot sticker and sugar snap peas. We both couldn't get over the light, but punched with some of the best flavors I've ever tasted. I loved the lemon and coconut blend that kept the flavor of my fish light and oh, so good.

Passion8 Bistro offers diners a culinary exploration of flavors from around the world in a comfortable, home-style setting that's not pretentious or intimidating. In fact, our hostess was Jessica Annunziata, the co-owner and wife of head chef Italian native Luca Annunziata. As we were leaving, even he came out of the kitchen to greet us. It's obvious just how passionate they are about showcasing a culinary experience and bringing you back for more.

They even offer special dinners monthly serving four courses and three wines, cooking classes, live entertainment every Wednesday and alternating Saturday nights, and catering. This bistro would be perfect for impressing a date, marking a milestone or a special celebration, or simply to check out at

lunch or dinner for a culinary adventure.

Although Passion8 Bistro is compact in size, it's big on class and what it dishes out, creating flavors you'll savor ... and savor some more.

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