

A hotel nook is emerging nicely
The Italian spot has a new name

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Mystery Muncher

Back in the mid-to-late 1980s, a Muncher in his pre-Deputy years was working behind the desk of a suburban hotel. The property, now the Scanticon Hotel and Conference Center (next to the Valley Forge Convention Center), featured an Italian restaurant called Bocconcini. Most locals never knew about the shadowy gem tucked away in the lobby's corner. The young Dep did, though, passing it by hungrily with each shift, envious of guests partaking of their delicious-looking dinners. For him, it was bland leftovers served in the employee cafeteria.

Fast forward to today and to a new management team and a new name, Blue Grotto. The restaurant is emerging with a solid reputation from its hotel nook, and so the Dep, a hotel employee no more, figured it was time to pay a visit.

He and his companion were impressed by their surroundings, which resemble a lovely Tuscan villa. A welcoming brick arch entranceway, railings with intertwining wrought-iron grape leaves and a burbling fountain lend a Mediterranean air: To one side, a dark and romantic bar beckons, with 30 specialty martini selections and a popular fondue menu.

A friendly server brought over a basket of fresh breads and roasted red pepper dip. Noshers, beware! This starter can be addictive and belly-filling.

The duo shared an appetizer – eggplant Neapolitan topped with crispy fried mozzarella cheese (\$9). The Dep then lent a spoon and they both enjoyed the Kennett Square wild mushroom bisque (\$5), which, they agreed, was one of the best they've tried in the area.

Entrees were excellent. Tender veal piccata was simmered with lemon, capers and sauvignon blanc and topped with asparagus (\$21). Angel hair pasta with grilled chicken, asparagus tips, peppers and marinara (\$19) was a comforting main course, as well.

The Dep left Blue Grotto feeling satisfied. And this time, there was no blah cafeteria food in sight.