

## THE APPIAN WAY

### A Diamond in the Heart of Schenectady The Queen of Great Italian Food

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(five stars)

The Summer crowds are usually rushing to Saratoga for entertainment and fine dining. While Saratoga has a lot to offer, I am usually rushing in the opposite direction, towards a little jewel in the middle of Schenectady by the name of The Appian Way. I never thought I'd say the Capital Region now has a better choice of Italian restaurants than Little Italy, but it does. One restaurant, The Appian Way, sets the standard and raises the bar for all.

The Appian Way is known as "the queen of long roads", a long ancient path-way connecting Rome to Brandisi. While The Appian Way in Rome is extremely well-known, the Appian Way in Schenectady is not—which brings me to my first issue in writing this review: Must I review one of the greatest restaurants in all of New York, at the risk of it becoming too popular? Living up to its nickname, this is the queen of restaurants.

There's lots of fine Italian restaurants out there, and we will be reviewing all of them. But the bar is set with The Appian Way. For one reason and one reason only: This is home cooking, from start to finish. The attention to details and to the customer can only come from the heart. This is a family restaurant. The master chef is Gina Montavo, direct from Italy, who cooks with her sister. Gina's son and niece are the wait staff. There's also usually a child or two running around or playing nicely.

Home-cooked means home made, and this sets this restaurant apart from so many others. Where else can you go and have the owner of the restaurant hand make you a delicious meal? There's no stand-in chef. No substitute. This is Gina and her sister making you food from the heart, and you simply don't get this anywhere else any more. This is a gift from the heart, a dying breed of home cooking that has been long lost to fast food and big chains.

You will hear Gina hand-pound veal on the counter in the back room.

While your dinner is being made, have some bread—bread Gina made.

With an antipasto salad. Yes, she makes her own hard sausage for the salad, not to mention home made prosciutto.

And when your dish arrives, it will be accompanied by a side of pasta with sauce. The pasta, hand-made. Ditto the sauce.

Don't even think of skipping dessert, which is Gina's very own home-made Gelato—now also shipped and sold to restaurants throughout New York as *Gina's*. Such restaurants include Delmonico's Steak House and the Stockade Inn.

For the appetizer, we usually share an antipasto. This comes with Gina's home-made hard sausage, an array of mushroom, peppers and cheese, and lots of home made prosciutto, delectably aged and thinly cut. Add a little olive oil to that homemade Italian bread, sneak a few slices of prosciutto with it, and *viola!* A sandwich made in heaven.

Entrees are always difficult, because they're all so good. Gina's specialty is her veal. The Veal Campagnola is comprised of perfectly cooked veal, blended with a wonderful medley of vegetables including peas, onions and cooked tomatoes. The flavors commend each other supremely.

A stand-by favorite is the Penne Vodka. This is one of the best Penne Vodka ever, and there's plenty to share (a great bargaining chip for the other players at the table).

Gina does usually have a special or two. One special we always hope for is the Osso Bucco, a succulent cooked-to-perfection veal shank, where the meat falls flawlessly off the bone with so much as a prod with the fork.

Dessert consists of homemade gelato, and, if you're lucky, some baked goods. Want more than one flavor? Because this is a family restaurant, just ask for a half scoop of this and a half scoop of that. This is home-made Italian ice cream, and you will want to taste them all: Hazelnut, Cinnamon, frutti di bosco (mixed berry), [Strachetella](#) (vanilla with chocolate shavings), and chocolate (rich, creamy gelato with authentic Belgium chocolate).

For parties of four or more, be sure to reserve the table in front of the fireplace on the cold winter days.

Total tab for two, including two glasses of wine each? Just under seventy dollars.

This remains our favorite restaurant. It beats anything in Little Italy. The Appian Way is a gift to us all: Personal service, home-styled cooking, hand-made everything, and an attention to detail you just can't find anywhere else.

This restaurant and its owner represent a true gift to us, and there's not a lot of places like this any more.

We will see you there.

In the meantime: Bon Appetit, and *Ciao!*

**Review:**

Authentic Homemade Italian Food

Reservations Recommended

Service: \*\*\*\*\*

Food: \*\*\*\*\*

Price: \*\*\*\*\*

Two people, appetizer and desert, under \$70

Recommended Dishes:

Appetizer: Antipasto (\$6.95), Caprese (Mozzarella and Tomato, \$6.95)

Entree: Veal Campagnola (\$15.95), Penne Vodka (\$10.95)

Recommended when available: Osso Bucco

Dessert: Gelatto (yes, you can mix flavors!)- Hazelnut, Cinnamon, Fruit des Mare, Strachetella, Chocolate