

THE ART OF SEDUCTION

Downtown Decadence at Vitis

by Evan James

Vitis
535 NW 16th St
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It's the season for loving: sultry nights and summertime horniness encourage the pursuit of carnal pleasures. In the game of attraction, there's no replacement for an appeal to the senses; so skip the dive bar tonight, and opt for an atmosphere that leaves your date smitten. If you're in the mood to spark some excitement, Vitis has all the right moves.

As any Don Juan surely knows, drinking is an integral part of the seduction process, and Vitis knows their vino: the wine list is several pages long. Even if your budget isn't enormous, don't worry, because you can get a disarming bottle of red for \$15. Try their Clay Station Old Vine Zinfandel, a spicy California red with strains of plum, cherry, and vanilla. Another winner is the Arancio Syrah from Italy, a smooth red with a sumptuous, fruity finesse.

Once the blood starts flowing, try an appetizer of artisan breads with butter, roasted garlic, and salsa verde with parsley and capers. Grilled and brushed with olive oil, the bread embraces the robust flavor of the garlic cloves and the sinuous salsa verde.

After your taste buds are sufficiently teased, move onto dinner. The menu at Vitis is tapas oriented, so you're entitled to a couple dishes each. A dazzling smorgasbord of sights and smells will grace your table, a seamless transition to the next phase of sensual rapture.

Relaxed and feeling adventurous, I opted for the white wine steamed mussels with saffron, and the special, battered and fried squash blossoms stuffed with mozzarella and anchovies. The presentation was extraordinary, and escalated the total sensory enchantment of the meal. The delicate undertones of white wine and saffron calmed the strong flavor of the mussels, whose midnight blue shells contrasted beautifully against a sea of golden broth. The squash blossoms were incredible: lightly fried, each mouthful melted against my palate and guided me deeper into the salty, voluptuous combination of mozzarella and anchovies.



photo by Bryan Richardson

My handsome date ordered a heap of fried calamari, served with a scintillating tomato garlic sauce that perfectly completed the dish. He also had fritelle di cavolfiore, cauliflower served with ricotta. The time-honored pairing of cauliflower and cheese wrapped in a tender breading asserted a vigorous, hearty flavor. Other delicious possibilities include marinated quail with prosciutto, and tender veal rolls with fava beans and pancetta.

To complete the aphrodisiac, order one of Vitis's tasty desserts. We had the prosecco poached pear; the fruit arrived stripped of its skin and bathed in heavenly mascarpone mousse and thick caramel. The crisp sweetness of the pear soaked up the mascarpone, and the caramel wrapped everything in richness. Also available: velvety blackberry gelato, crispy walnut popovers, and a bittersweet chocolate tart.

Be sure to conclude your experience at Vitis with a cup of coffee: it can prevent you from acting like a fumbling lush after drinking two bottles of wine. Take your date on a nice post-prandial walk through the streets--and wherever you end up after that is none of my business.