

**Ottimista  
Enoteca-Café**

1838 Union St.  
Cross: Octavia St.  
San Francisco, CA 94123

415-674-8400

[website](#)

Tue-Thu 11:30am-11pm

Fri 11:30am-2am

Sat 10am-2am

Sun 10am-10pm

*Apps/small plates \$5-\$16*

*Larger plates \$9-\$14*

*Desserts \$5-\$10*

APRIL 04, 2006 | SAN FRANCISCO Okay, I have a guilty secret that is about to get outed here: I occasionally eat in the Marina. And now that **~OTTIMISTA ENOTECA-CAFÉ~** has opened in the old Rica's space (yes, it's on Union Street for crissakes) I decided I might as well come clean so you could think about checking it out. (Maybe you're sneaking around the Marina too?)

Co-owner Melissa Gisler has assembled a warm and rustic space, with mismatched vintage chairs, nicely worn wood tables, a marble-topped bar with a back-bar lined with grappa bottles, peachy walls decorated with vintage family photos, and a chalkboard listing everything from bubbles to Italian whites to powerful reds—it kind of reminds me of the comfy feeling I get from Kokkari. There's also an outdoor patio in the front, with pillows and heat lamps.

Ottimista is an enoteca, which is a delightful Italian concept I really miss: a casual place to drink wine and graze on smaller dishes. I was there for lunch, so I only partook in some Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Bisol, "Crede" 2004 (\$8). But I could easily see myself swinging by for an early evening hangout with a pal over a couple glasses of wine that then boozily eases into dinner.

The executive chef/co-owner, Mark Young, has worked at the Lark Creek Inn, Slanted Door, and most recently under Slow Club's former chef, Sante Salvo. The daytime menu includes the signature green olives baked in an Asiago pastry crust (\$5). Totally illegal—they are coated with a biscuit-like dough, with a touch of pimentón. What's not to love? There is a selection of antipasti, like a salumi plate (\$9 small/\$15 large) and a cheese plate (\$10 small/\$16 large). I dug into a trio of crostini topped with truffled white bean puree, eggplant caponata, and grappa-cured salmon with a chive mascarpone spread (\$6). I found the bread cut a little too thick and crispy (there went the roof of my mouth), but the toppings were scrumptious. FYI, they have a focus on organic, local, and sustainable ingredients, but they don't name-check every producer on the menu.

Since they're smart, they also offer a pizza of the day (\$11). Ours was a cheese-fest of mascarpone, ricotta, smoked mozzarella, and Montasio cheese, a new one for me. (It's a DOC aged cow's milk cheese from the Friuli, and it had a savory piquancy.) The pizza also had wild mushrooms and sautéed leeks on top, with a crispy crust. Great flavor. I was ready to curl up in it.

I also enjoyed a salad of arugula, frisee, and radicchio, with a poached egg and pancetta—the vinaigrette was spot-on, and counterbalanced the egg like a champ. The lunch menu also lists some grilled panini (\$9), a couple more salads, and a pasta. For dessert, the ricotta doughnuts in nutmeg sugar (\$6) were wicked little sugar balls of bad for you. Mmmmm, doughnuts. I also liked the array of well-worn or mismatched vintage dishes that the food is served on—it's a nice touch.

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For dinnertime, word on the street is people are nutty for the larger plates of Soave-braised pork with polenta (\$14) and their rotating pasta dishes. Ottimista also serves brunch on the weekend. I've been told the place is a madhouse on Friday and Saturday nights, so you won't find me there then—too many chicks poured into their True Religions. But for those of you on the hunt for Marina folk packing a horny wine buzz on, this may be for you. (There's also a full bar, so you can really test your wine and hard liquor blending tolerance.) My mellow mid-week lunch was much more my speed.

Ottimista hosts wine tasting events and Italian lessons (with a wine paring, natch); you can read about events [here](#). The wine director/co-owner, Jerad Ruhl, has worked with Booth McKinney (while at Zibbibo and Azie) and was sommelier and wine director for Rose Pistola. The wine list reflects his love of smaller Italian family-run producers, and they will pour anything from a 2 oz. size to a full glass, in addition to some flights. Like that other restaurant known for their Italian wines in the Marina, Ottimista is trying to take the mystery and fear out of Italian vinos. Let's all just lighten up, really now. The glass should be half full, and if it's not, you're in the right place to rectify the situation. 🍷