

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Tailor's Son excels at delicate Italian cooking for San Francisco's chicest crowds

The new northern Italian restaurant makes a fine risotto in sleek new digs on Fillmore Street, writes critic Soleil Ho



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It might be the reopening of San Francisco, or it might be the pasta, but the 2-month-old Tailor's Son is already a Fillmore Street dining destination. Even on the weekdays, there's a queue at the door when the restaurant opens at 5 p.m., with diners vying for an opportunity to indulge in negronis, fresh pasta and duck liver pâté. The servers' handsome aprons and the bright and minty fresh interior feel polished and chic, communicating an optimism that in itself feels like a luxury. Yet the food, centered in the homestyle cuisine of northern Italy, is fun and approachable. It all makes you want to be here.

A personal project of Back of the House restaurant group founder Adriano Paganini, the Tailor's Son is inspired by his upbringing in northern Italy. Paganini, the eponymous tailor's son, grew up in Solbiate Olona, a small village close to the Swiss border where his mother raised him on a diet of simple dishes, like belly-warming and creamy risotto alla Milanese, a centuries-old rice dish colored with precious strands of saffron.

Accordingly, the menu by chefs Freedom Rains (also of A Mano) and Tali Missirlian leans toward the take-it-slow cooking made for the cooler, rainier climate of northern Italy: risottos, braises and handmade fresh pastas.



Executive chef Freedom Rains (left) and Chef de Cuisine Tali Missirlian at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.

Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

The rotolo pasta (\$21), a favorite of most of the servers, rolls fresh pasta and a filling of braised rabbit, Fontina cheese and spinach into a spiral shape, which is then sliced into attractive roulades. Finished in an oven, the pasta's edges seize up into crisp patches, with caps of caramelized cheese. The shredded rabbit is tender, with the slow braise and rendered fat giving it a subtly gelatinous texture.



Rotolo w/ rabbit at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.

Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

Risotto is a particular focus. When Paganini spoke to The Chronicle about this opening, he lamented the lack of great risotto in San Francisco, despite the glut of Italian restaurants. You need to baby risotto, stir it like you're petting a newborn kitten, and most restaurant kitchens don't have the time nor the staff to do something so delicate. If someone is multitasking too much, you can see it in the way the grains clump together, feel it in the



uneven texture. For great risotto, the dish has to be your focus from the get-go, and this is where Tailor's Son gets it right.

The risotto alla Milanese (\$18) shines — literally. Butter and Parmesan coat each grain of saffron-tinted rice, each one a bona fide happy pill. For \$4, you can add bone marrow, in the form of a vertical piece of beef bone filled with squishy, fatty meat butter; for \$6, Milanese ossobuco in the form of shredded shank meat. Reducing ossobuco, normally served as an entrée in itself at other places, to something you just add onto the risotto tells you exactly what matters most to the restaurant.



— Risotto milanese w/ bone marrow at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

The three-item entree section that follows might come off as second-fiddle, since you might get too overwhelmed by the pasta-laden carbfest to think about anything else. But skipping the polpo (\$21), the octopus dish, would be a mistake. A tender braised tentacle is charred on a grill, cooked until the very tip looks like a spent match. It's served atop a pleasant chickpea ragu, and a dollop of olive tapenade gives each bite a bright finish.

Despite the menu's comforting fare and nods to parochial village life, the decor is unambiguously cosmopolitan. The space, which formerly housed [Elite Cafe](#), has been decked out in pristine white subway tiles, red marble details and floral wallpapers. The service style is attentive and almost normal-feeling; it seems like the pandemic-era staffing shortages aren't a major issue at this restaurant, because I observed plenty of people filling water glasses, running food and chatting with diners about the menu. Orders come out at a brisk pace as well.



Bar area at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

A cocktail menu is home to aperitivos, negronis and house concoctions that accompany the food well. I found the Velvet Smoking Jacket (\$14) to be the most complementary option for the rich pastas and risottos. Mole bitters, smoked cinnamon and Cynar 70 proof make the bourbon drink astringent, with aromas of bonfire and forest floor. Each sip slices through the bulky flavors of prosciutto and brown butter with ease.



Carly Spina (right) and Bela Horky enjoy a meal at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

Though richer dishes are where this restaurant excels, don't ignore the vegetable-heavy starters in your pursuit of comfort. The kitchen takes full advantage of California's growing seasons. Fritto misto (\$12) features a springtime melange of fried asparagus, spring onion bulbs and fennel. Fennel pollen is dusted over the whole dish, lending it a light, floral aroma familiar to anyone who's run their fingers through the wild fennel patches



that proliferate all over Northern California.

The snacky burrata crostini (\$14), meanwhile, includes diced green tomato pickles with lots of bite to them; its counterpart with duck liver pâté gets a slash of huckleberry compote. And the chicory alla Romana (\$12), a flavorful take on what Americans know as the Caesar salad, pairs pink-streaked chicory with a creamy soft-boiled egg, sour white anchovy fillets and Parmesan shavings. It'll make you never want to eat a normal Caesar again.



Chicory alla romana at Tailor's Son on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, Calif., on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

Here's my advice, if you're ordering for a table of four. Get two vegetable dishes, a crostini (it's cut into four pieces), two risotto dishes, a pasta and the octopus. Save room for the pavlova (\$10), a meringue dessert adorned with chunks of rhubarb and strawberry rounds; dots of saba, a concentrate of grape must, add depth to the otherwise ethereal dessert.

Tailor's Son has a fine balance of nostalgia and on-trend design that makes it a fine place to reminisce — about your last trip to Italy; your first attempt at making risotto; the last time someone who loved you cooked for you. If you've been saving your post-lockdown re-entry into the San Francisco dining scene for someplace special, sentimental and gentle, it would be a great first stop.