

ANTICA PESA

115 Berry St., Brooklyn (347-763-2635)

By Lizzie Widdicombe

The original Antica Pesa, in Rome's Trastevere neighborhood, is one of those quaint little family-owned restaurants with a celebrity following (according to press reports, Quentin Tarantino likes the *cacio e pepe*). At its new Williamsburg location, the décor is slick: mod white light fixtures, huge leather couches, roaring fireplace. The crowd—when it does not include Madonna and her backup dancers, who stopped by recently, according to Page Six—usually has a fair number of tourists, plus some young professionals and European party people. A jazz band sometimes plays. For the disoriented: you're not in Rome, or a midtown hotel. This is the new new Williamsburg—of the coming Whole Foods, the megaclubs, and the glass condos on the waterfront.

The most ambitious thing about Antica Pesa may be its pricing: eighteen-dollar appetizers, twenty-eight-dollar entrées, and, on the wine list, an eleven-hundred-dollar bottle of Barbaresco. The formula resembles that of Manhattan power-lunch spots like Casa Lever, with a variation: instead of serving traditional Italian food in a modern setting, the owners have taken traditional Roman food and attempted to modernize it. The effect is not always Lever level. One night, a fifteen-dollar appetizer was billed as a “trip through the Italian countryside.” It turned out to be chunks of cheese, slices of salami, and a single breadstick draped with bresaola ham, in individual vessels that looked like ashtrays. In another appetizer, eggplant slices are fried and then wedged, vertically, into a loglike schmear of mascarpone and ricotta cheese. The effect is decadent without being especially flavorful—it tastes like cream-cheese-dipped potato chips.

Antica Pesa's better moments come when it sticks to more traditional pastas. The *cacio e pepe*—Tarantino's jam—is creamy and firm. The pasta all'Amatriciana gets an extra kick of oil, served by an attentive waiter (“You like hot sauce, ladies?”), plus hot red pepper, snipped tableside with what look like nail clippers. But things go off the rails again with the entrées. The lamb chops, which the servers keep telling you about, are refreshingly simple but a little greasy. Baccalà alla Romana (salt cod) resembles a bland fish goulash, more salt than fish. The description of the *maialino porchetta e ovetto* (“pork loin, slow-cooked pork belly, fluffy egg white, marinated egg yolks, and asparagus”) promises so much. The reality: a light but tasteless pile of egg whites and pork that is somehow both undercooked and a little rubbery.

There are bright spots in the service, and the blingy atmosphere is a welcome deviation from Brooklyn clichés—who needs another faux-rustic farm-to-table establishment? You could have a good, if overpriced, meal here if you stuck to wine, pasta, and gelato—try the blueberry sorbet (pure and tart). But, for the most part, the restaurant tracks pretty well with Williamsburg's real-estate market: it may look like Manhattan—and cost almost as much—but it's still experiencing growing pains. (Open every night for dinner. Entrées \$21-\$30.) ♦



Lizzie Widdicombe is an editor of *The Talk of the Town*. [Read more »](#)

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