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## Continental quality, no pretense at The Vienna in Southbridge

By Bob Datz telegram & gazette reviewer

Arnold and Maria will just have to stop in Southbridge to see how their familial roots entwine to produce a fine dining experience. Maybe they'll be moved enough to adopt this spritely 5-year-old growing up in a nice Victorian home on a small-town street corner.

The Vienna opened in 2003, and it's hardly moping despite its old-world atmosphere. Its Web site touts it as "the only Austrian restaurant in Massachusetts." The Vienna isn't a waltz for the wallet, with dinner entrées ranging from \$19 to \$34. But the novel cuisine twirled our taste lightly alongside the upbeat Bavarian music playing in the inn's intimate dining rooms on a recent early Saturday evening visit.

There are several rooms under the mansard roof devoted to dining and four devoted to overnight guests, each group sprinkled about two floors. A two-seater cocktail bar is in the foyer that divides two equally sized dining rooms on the main floor. Décor is comfortable,

### The Vienna Restaurant & Historic Inn

14 South St., Southbridge  
[www.thevienna.com](http://www.thevienna.com)

**Phone:** (508) 764-0700; (866) 284-3662

**Hours:** Dinner: 5-10 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, other days by reservation only

**Lunch:** Noon-2 p.m. Friday, other days by reservation only.

**Parking:** Private lot on premises. Handicapped access via ramp.

**Credit cards:** Visa, MasterCard, Discover, American Express.

**Prices:** Expensive, entrées \$19 to \$34.

**Pluses:** Helpful, upbeat and prideful service, for good reason: Excellent quality and the opportunity to try something exotic with ingredients that are familiar and artfully blended.

**Minuses:** A couple of missing seafood menu items can't scratch the rating, at least from this meat-lover.

classy and not overdone, a metaphor for our entire excursion.

Simple cheese and crackers helped us peruse the menu along with wine and beer choices made and delivered by Ron, our server, based on our descriptions of our tastes. We chose two contrasting appetizers, both deluxe: Seared scallops (market price, that day \$15) came three on the plate, each 2 inches in diameter and served in a pool of beurre blanc sauce streaked over with a deep brown balsamic reduction. The scallops themselves were uncomplicated, perhaps some paprika and pepper, barely blackened on the outside. My braised rabbit Dürnsteiner (\$8) included tender chunks of meat in a rich, brown sauce that stifled the proverbial "tastes like chicken" remark, accompanied by wild mushrooms, smoked Black Forest bacon and peas.

My lifelong companion and I swapped appetizers with pleasure, a good idea since I ended up ordering a similar concoction with my dinner choice of tenderloin beef stroganoff (\$23), lean and luscious. Its sauce proved creamier and loaded with mushrooms. Like the one that came with the rabbit, it was sturdy but not overweight.

The Real Critic chose one of three specials, domesticated boar (\$32) slow-roasted for seven hours and standing tall on its shank bone. Both of us tried and shied away from the spicy mustard sauce served on the side, agreeing that the herbs coating the forkfuls that fell away from the bone so easily were more than sufficient accents.

Red cabbage and a light German egg pasta, spätzle, accompanied both dinners. The cabbage was flavored by a blend of what Ron described as apples, vinegar (not overpowering) and a whole lot more — flavorful enough so that sauerkraut haters can approach without fear.

Simple lettuce-and-radish salads topped with (no choice offered here) curry vinaigrette dressing, and warm, crusty bread preceded the entrées — both light and cleansing warm-ups.

There were 19 main courses in all, including the three evening specials. Several feature pork but other random samples are vegetarian ravioli and Hofbraühaus Schlachtplatte, combining a smoked pork chop, brat and knockwurst. Both are \$22. Evidently a fish procurement problem wiped one entrée (rainbow trout, \$21) and one appetizer (Cured Fresh Salmon Gravlox, \$10) off the evening's slate.

Hey — dessert! As a gauge of the portions, room remained to sample from among seven types of torte (Das ist "cake"), each \$9. My wife's hazelnut was an Aryan delight, all beige and butter creamy-like. Black Forest chocolate gave my buds a nice bounce with chocolate mousse and cherry separating various layers — and still moist at home a day later.

Leftovers were tastefully placed in swan-shaped twists of aluminum foil rather than what-do-we-care Styrofoam so frequently used. And speaking of flourishes, my wife pegged the brilliant orange blossoms adorning both appetizer and dinner plates as nasturtiums, in season and abundant on the relaxing side porch outside.

Alas, we had to pay. Strip away drinks, tax and gratuity and the bill for three courses for two diners was \$96. But if Arnold looks back upon his experience as fondly as we do on ours, Southbridge may hear a reprise of that signature line from "The Terminator" himself.

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