

## Starters: La Bottega in Ridgewood

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BY JOYCE VENEZIA SUSS

SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

THE RECORD

The menu at La Bottega Italian Gourmet in [Ridgewood](#) is extensive, the servers are knowledgeable, the dining room is often full, and takeout and delivery service is brisk. It seems like this new restaurant has been around for longer than a few weeks – and in a way, it has.

La Bottega is the 24th in a small chain of restaurants mostly on Long Island and in Queens (one is located in Sicily); this location is the first franchise in New Jersey.

"[Ridgewood](#) fits the model of the La Bottega concept — quaint towns, shopping, tight-knit communities, and just a great town for people to enjoy light, fresh, simple food," says Frank DiMaiuta, owner of the Ridgewood restaurant.

La Bottega began 12 years ago on Long Island, when Giuseppe Ruta and his wife, Marissa, opened a food store offering Italian specialties and panini.

"After it took off, he saw the opportunity to expand and got into franchising," DiMaiuta says.

In [Ridgewood](#), La Bottega is in the space once occupied by the popular Joel's Malibu Kitchen. After Joel closed his restaurant, two others followed – Grape Leaves, and Basil & Thyme – but neither lasted long.

Ever since La Bottega opened, "business has been brisk," DiMaiuta says. "I don't think people know the name, but they know the good food. We've seen a lot of repeat customers."

When DiMaiuta explored [Ridgewood](#) as a possible site for a new La Bottega, it gave him pause. "I saw all the closed storefronts,

and that made me nervous," he says. "But we took a chance because we believe in the concept so well."

The restaurant's interior was painted in warm colors "to make it a soft, intimate setting," and a tin ceiling was added, he says. Wide-plank wood floors and rustic decorations add to the ambience.

The core menu at all La Bottega restaurants features more than 60 panini — grilled pressed sandwiches in an array of flavor combinations; they are also available gluten-free.

Other specialties are bruschetta — toasted slices of ciabatta with different toppings, such as the Classica, with fresh tomato, garlic and fresh basil, and the Gambieri, with roasted jumbo shrimp, tomatoes and hot peppers.

DiMaiuta touts the butternut squash soup, which he thinks is "the best," but the most popular dish is the Anthony panini, with grilled chicken, mozzarella, baby arugula and balsamic in a triangular "krispina" roll. Another favorite is the turkey Sanremo, with roasted turkey, mozzarella, roasted hot peppers and guacamole on ciabatta.

Entrées include the best-selling rigatoni con salsiccia e piselli (pasta, sausage and peas in a fresh tomato sauce with a touch of cream) and salmon con crema di mostarda (pan-seared salmon in a creamy Dijon mustard sauce).

The chef is Francisco Mata, formerly of Le Jardin in [Edgewater](#); the wait staff trained at New York locations before the [Ridgewood](#) restaurant opened for business.

"The first few weeks have been amazing," DiMaiuta says. "The community has been extremely receptive. They seem to be enjoying our food."

Starters is a first look at recently opened restaurants. It is meant to be a descriptive glimpse, not a critical review. Send suggestions for Starters to [sherrill@northjersey.com](mailto:sherrill@northjersey.com).

### La Bottega

\* 14 Oak St., Ridgewood, 201-445-7222;  
LaBottegaRidgewoodNJ.com

\* Cuisine: Casual Italian, entrées \$6.75 to \$22.50

\* Hours/days: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday to Thursday,  
11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

\* Credit cards: All major

\* Wine/liquor: BYO

\* Parking: Street and municipal lot



MICHAEL KARAS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

With its warm colors, wide-plank floors and rustic décor, the interior of La Bottega offers a "soft, intimate setting," says Frank DiMaiuta, the restaurant's owner.

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