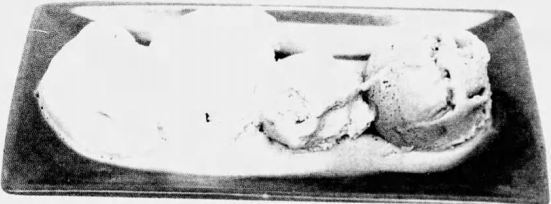


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WHICH ONE?



Pistachio four ways: from left, gelato from Ice Cream Patio, Gelatissimo, La Paloma and Gelato Gelato.

ICE ICE BAMBINO

Who dishes out the best (authentic?) gelato in Woodbridge

By ADAM McDOWELL

"This one is kind of my favourite," says the polite young man as he packs scoops of the beige Pistachio Sicilia into a plastic container. "It's more authentic, to be honest," than the bright green Pistachio Reale.

Ah, authenticity, the elusive goal of many a North American of Italian descent. The server at La Paloma Gelateria and Café in Woodbridge has unwittingly alerted me to the paradox of Italian culture (as well as unwittingly serving me lemon when I asked for vanilla). In Italy itself, culinary tradition, customs and techniques vary greatly from region to region, so who's to say what's authentic?

In my experience, Italian Canadians just end up using "authentic" as a synonym for "good."

The variety among gelatos — Italian ice cream, typically thicker and yet lower in fat than ordinary ice cream — in the old country could hardly be wider than the differences between four gelaterias competing around Hwy. 7 and Weston Road in Woodbridge. At each, I asked for vanilla and pistachio.

La Paloma (200 Windflower Gate, 416-656-9980, lapaloma.ca, \$16 for a one-litre take-away container) has easily the best location of the four. It's at the northwest corner of Weston and Hwy. 7. It's bright and clean and has a damned inconvenient cash-only policy. As mentioned above, La Paloma forfeited the vanilla portion of the contest when the server and I both failed to notice that he was packing lemon instead of vanilla. (The lemon was, nevertheless, refreshing and creamy and tasted of real lemons.)

La Paloma's pistachio is delicious, opening the container brings forth a whiff of real nuts. The beige hue looks natural. Tiny chunks of ice give the Pistachio Sicilia a homemade rusticity (although in reality, La Paloma's gelatos are made from bases imported from Italy).

Ice Cream Patio (149 Rowntree Dairy Rd., 905-850-3302, icecreampatio.com) was open and inviting in terms of decor. The restaurant no longer serves large take-home containers of gelato, which is just as well. I ordered a "medium" serving each of vanilla and pistachio. The walking turp who served me inexplicably packed the vanilla underneath the pistachio in each container, so I had to dig through the mediocre pistachio — gloops, neon-green stuff that tastes like a cross between bubblegum and artificial pistachio flavour — to get to the bland vanilla.

I walked into a — well, authentic scene at Gelato Gelato (hidden away at 100 Marycroft Ave., Unit 12, 905-851-0400; \$14.50/L, cash only): A posse of middle-age and elderly men listened as one of them told what sounded like a riddle in Italian.

Gelato Gelato's vanilla is deliciously rich and yet moreish, and tastes like natural vanilla, which the gelateria's owner says it is. Minuscule black vanilla bean specks are visible, if you look closely.

The little gelateria's medium-brown pistachio impresses me even more than its vanilla. It's a real nut lover's pistachio. While La Paloma's pistachio tastes like whole nuts, Gelato Gelato's tastes like they were crushed into pistachio butter before being made into ice cream. And it's stubbornly thick.

My last stop was Gelatissimo (2 Tall Grass Trail, Unit 4-5, 905-265-7725; \$14.75/L, like Gelato Gelato, it's tucked away in a grim industrial unit). Its gelatos are made from scratch on the premises, owner Quintino Leone later told me.

Gelatissimo's vanilla is creamy and contains so much sugar the granules crunch. You could murder a diabetic with it. It also has nice berry undertones. The pistachio is better — mild in flavour and silky smooth in texture.

So, which one? Overall, Gelato Gelato has the best (and the cheapest) gelato in Woodbridge. If you're getting ice cream for a party of grown-ups, it's the right choice. And if there are foodies on your list, they'll appreciate a gelato that tastes and smells natural.

If, however, you're catering for relatively unsophisticated palates, if you're serving children, for example — Gelatissimo's sweeter, less-challenging flavours could be just the thing.

And La Paloma gets an honorable mention in either situation.

Of course, since these Woodbridge gelaterias are indeed so close to one another, you could try more than one at a time and see what's "authentic" for you.

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La Paloma - Woodbridge

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