

In your hood: **Woodstock**

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Talking Italian

Scarpetta is a casual and vibey neighbourhood restaurant on Woodstock's Roodebloem Road

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Owner Ricky Turilli is a whirl of energy running the whole show at Scarpetta – kitchen and front of house. One moment he's jovially welcoming the latest arrivals, the next in the kitchen, then back taking you through the day's specials of classic Italian fare. There are several of these besides the permanent chalkboard menu, whatever fresh ingredients caught his eye out shopping that day inspiring the dishes for the evening.

"It's all about the simplicity of the dish, there's no airs and graces," he says. With no liquor licence, regulars arrive clutching their favourite vintage, or visit Salisburys Deli on the corner for a bottle. Ricky's jokes and quirky bonhomie encourage a convivial atmosphere, and every table was taken when we visited on a winter Wednesday evening.

Ricky advises us to eat like Italians with an antipasto, pasta, main and dessert, and makes it easy by suggesting we share one of each. This turns out to be the ideal amount of food – pasta portions are generous, served in a lidded casserole dish in the middle of the table. Forget sharing plates, this is sharing in homely family style.

Our antipasto is fine green asparagus wrapped in parma ham and fried, with a luscious blanket of bechamel and parmesan. Squares of focaccia mop up the last of the sauce – "fare la scarpetta" is the Italian for using a piece of bread to wipe the plate clean, which we enthusiastically do.

We're tempted by the seven-mushroom pasta, but then Ricky suggests spaghetti

alle vongole and we're easily persuaded. Lavishly sauced with clams both in and out of their shells, it's a winner – garlic, parsley, a light touch of chilli, white wine, and spaghetti at exactly the right point of al dente. Our main of tagliata, beef skirt steak grilled then sliced, served with roast vegetables, is simple and delicious with plenty of rosemary and garlic.

Tiramisu not being on the menu that day (it's only made when Ricky can get fresh mascarpone), we went for the cannoli, a crisp pastry shell filled with light ricotta mixed with sugar, lemon and orange zest and candied peel.

Open evenings only, locals have thoroughly taken Scarpetta to their hearts, so it's advisable to book. No pretensions, just really good Italian trattoria-style food with a cheerful lively vibe.

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