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Best Restaurants

EUROPEAN

new AMBER GARDEN AND DALMACIA RESTAURANT

★★★½

"Relax, we will take care of you" is a refrain you're bound to hear at the relocated Amber Garden. After a decade on Richmond Road filling stomachs and practising the nearly lost art of hospitality, the charming Nowacki family bought the long-running Dalmacia restaurant on Carling Avenue. Since 2006, they've added Dalmacia to the name and continued serving the warming and soulful traditional dishes of Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. No one would ask their grandmother to mess with treasured family recipes, and likewise no liberties are taken here — no shortcuts either. Perogies, like all the dishes, are made by hand. The result is the lightest melt-in-the-mouth half moons imaginable, topped with sweet onion and plenty of sour cream. Don't expect to find cheddar in the potato-cheese filling: it's authentic dry cottage cheese with the faintest hint of mint. Delicious meat-filled perogies are remarkably fluffy inside, while the sauerkraut and mushroom filling balances earthy flavours with sweet. The same applies to a simple bowl of borscht, topped with snipped dill and sour cream. A salad of tiny cubes of root vegetables rivals the best creamy chilled potato salad and is surrounded by a fan of sliced tomato, apple, pickle, and cucumber. Apparently there are regulars here who cannot order anything but the rich, peppery beef goulash spilling out of an enormous, decadent potato pancake. Still, it's difficult to resist the Amber platter option, a generous sampling of several house specialties: a pair of perogies, a plump cabbage roll, chicken paprikash, classic veal schnitzel, an all-natural mildly smoky Debreceni sausage complete with ballpark mustard, as well as steamed veggies and delicate spaetzle (fresh egg noodles). While it's almost impossible to do so, if you can manage it, it's well worth saving room for dessert. Two recommended choices are the flaming crepes and a square of light, crumbly cheesecake kissed with peaches. A hot cup of wild-berry infusion is served with tales of a childhood in Poland where the owner's mother sent her to the forest to pick the leaves and berries necessary for this curative tea. Closed Sunday and Monday. Mains \$14.95-\$25.95. 1702 Carling Ave., 613-728-0000, www.ambergarden.net.