



Royal Blue Grocery and CiboDivino Bring Downtown Options

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Add another two upscale bodegas to the downtown lunch landscape.

A few intrepid spots have opened in what used to be the wasteland-food desert of the downtown area near the Arts District, where the main places to grab a bite during the working week involved underground steakhouses, fine-dining fare, or maybe a burger snagged from the ground floor of First Baptist Church, and the closest thing to a bodega was 7-Eleven. Recent development brought combination options in new buildings. Two established spots have touched down with refreshing, downtown takes. Here's a peek.

CiboDivino's Centro

I went to Italy for the first time today when I stepped inside the new CiboDivino Marketplace downtown. Owner Daniele Puleo and his wife Christina opened the first CiboDivino in 2015 in Sylvan Thirty, the shopping center in West Dallas. Like the original location, the one in Bryan Tower, called Centro, specializes in Italian provisions, with food ranging from counter-order pizza to prepared dishes made with ingredients imported from Italy.

The original location is as charming as I imagine Italy would be, with its gargantuan golden-tile imported wood-fired pizza oven, packages of fancy Italian pastas with names I butchered, and tiramisu in the glass pastry case. The patio wraps around the building with twinkle lights dancing above for ambiance.

The downtown location has, predictably, a more grab-and-go vibe, ideal for downtown denizens seeking a quick and convenient lunch spot. High ceilings and huge windows let light fill the entire shop. It was buzzing and slightly overwhelming when I went during a recent lunchtime rush. (Rookie mistake, I know.) Near the entrance, there's a cozy coffee bar and white, circular tables for seating.

As I made my way through the masses of people, I passed large communal tables occupied by men and women dressed in professional wear. I meandered between the lines queued for house-made entrées with signs above them reading "PASTA" and "CHEF'S TABLE." Toward the back, a case holds prepared salads and other foods in case the lines for the hot food are too long. I couldn't help but notice the fancy wine selection in a U-shaped rack, many imported from Italy. There is a vibrant green patio outfitted in red furniture that added a nice pop of color against the modern structure of Centro. I guess CiboDivino might be as close to Italy as I'll get, till I get there. — A.A.

Note: Royal Blue Grocery is open until 10 p.m., CiboDivino Centro until 7 p.m.