

NEW YORK

THE WEEK

RESTAURANTS

EDITED BY ROBIN RAISFELD & ROB PATRONITE

ASK GAEL

All I want is a light supper before the show.

AZALEA, JUST WALKING DISTANCE FROM curtains-up, has what you crave, in its sublime mozzarella with roasted bell pepper and prosciutto and a half order of mezze maniche—short-sleeved rigatoni stuffed with veal on white truffle cream, a rich-as-Berlusconi notion from Parma. What seems at first like yet another copycat Italian outpost, and a pricey one at that, is actually pleasantly understated with yachtlike wood finishes, Georgia O’Keeffe prints everywhere, a proud host on the floor, and real finesse in the kitchen. Four courses, in the traditional Italian mode, can quickly add up, but garlicky mussels in pesto, half an order of clam-and-tomato-tossed scialatielli noodles (thick and wonderfully al dente), and a glass of red wine make preheater sense. Overcooked halibut (with luscious mushroom ragout) and the hokey but delicious Parmesan stage set for slivered fennel and grilled shrimp are more than offset by a perfection of Chilean sea bass with favas and tomato, and the roast duck in thick meaty slices with almost fruity sweet-and-sour pearl onions. (224 West 51st Street; 212-262-0105.)



THE REBIRTH OF VENUS? Azalea’s tasty, crispy Parmesan shell holds grilled shrimp and slivers of fennel.