

Hydroponic Bibb Salad



I think it was department store mogul William T. Dillard that named "location, location, location" as one of keys to business success. So picture an award winning, fine dining restaurant replete with crisp white linens, beautifully presented plates and fine wine. Now picture the President and First Family dining in one of the private dining rooms. Ok, now picture this same award winning, fine dining, visited-by-the-President of the United States of America-restaurant located in none other than a strip mall in Panama City Beach. Yet, Firefly is an absolute dining standout with plenty of inner beauty.

The minute you step through the doors, you are enveloped into its charming atmosphere. Our first stop was the Firefly Bar. Rich dark wood and deep mocha colored walls with muted, warm lighting provided a relaxing backdrop to enjoy a cocktail. My friend and I sidled up to the beautiful granite top bar for sushi and martinis off the specialty menu. We chose Firefly's "Blue Acai" made with Absolut Acai vodka and the "Orange Mojito" with Ketel One Oranje vodka, mint and lime. Bartenders Jesse and Blaine made us feel right at home, so we sipped on our exceptionally crafted concoctions and basked in our elegant surroundings.

The rest of Firefly's hefty square footage is masterfully transformed into a series of intimate private dining rooms, a grand main dining room, and the bar's adjacent lounge. The "535 Library Lounge" is fitted with sumptuous seating, a crackling fireplace and bookshelves filled with rustic volumes. It is home to live music on Friday and Saturday nights and reverts to a metropolitan man cave for Monday Night Football.

FIREFLY

by Susanna Bartoldus

Speaking of football, our "Heisman" maki roll arrived and definitely lived up to its MVP status. Ahi tuna graced the inside and outside of this roll, with avocado, green onion and tempura crunch. A dollop of sambal (chili paste) added some welcome heat. We opted to pair it with a glass of Belle Glos Meiomi Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, from Firefly's award-winning wine list. We would have gladly whiled the hours of the evening away just where we were, but our table was ready.

on the plate. While we both thoroughly enjoyed the Tuna, for me, the Boar Shank stole the show.

Chef Stellato's Boar Shank is a shameless dish of medieval proportions served with a wild mushroom risotto cake and a chipotle honey sauce. The succulent meat unapologetically drops from the bone into rich smoky tomato drippings. The risotto cake had a wonderful outer crust and earthy flavors that complimented the rest of the dish. I loved every savory outrageous bite.

She Crab Soup



Our initial reluctance in leaving the bar soon evaporated as we were seated under the twinkling canopy of the enormous oak tree that graces the center of the dining room. After the prompt arrival of rustic sourdough bread with a trio of spreads, followed by Chef Paul Stellato's She Crab Soup, the bar was the faintest of memories. This bowl of liquid velvet afloat with buttery puff pastry transcends decadence with its flirty drizzle of cream sherry. If you love yourself, you will order this soup.

The rest of the meal was a steady crescendo. For the salad course, we opted with the hydroponic Bibb salad with goat cheese and strawberries with warm pecan brown butter. This dish shined with its melange of flavors and textures and gorgeous color. We selected our entrees with pioneering spirit, choosing the Espresso and Tomato Braised Texas Free Range Boar Shank and the Barbeque Ahi Tuna. The Ahi Tuna is a delectable sashimi grade A "steak" served rare with a smear of smoky barbeque sauce

Pepper Encrusted Filet Mignon



For dessert, I succumbed to peer pressure and ordered the White Chocolate Crème Brulee. Delicious, undoubtedly, yes. Yet, I am still haunted by the thought of the Flourless Chocolate Rum Cake I didn't taste. Lance, our exemplary server and fellow chocolate lover, your efforts to steer me on the path will not be in vain. I will be back.

Owner David Bellevue discussed the history behind Firefly's "inner beauty" and success. The tree is reminiscent of the beautiful oaks that lined St Andrew's Bay in his previous restaurant, Canopies. It closed when the property was sold to make room for condos. "It was our way of bringing the view with us." As for the restaurant's success, he modestly says, "I just got lucky."

Firefly is located at 535 Richard Jackson Boulevard in the Shoppes at Edgewater. For more information call 850-249-3359 or visit online at www.fireflypcb.com.