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If location is the key to happiness and success, then Saltwater Grille has it made in the shade. It feels so right in Stamford's Shippan Point, a short jaunt from Greenwich at exit 8 off I-95. No matter where you sit or stand in the restaurant, you will have a view of dozens of yachts and sailboats, even the occasional tugboat pulling a barge. If you're lucky enough to snare a table on either the upper or lower deck on a warm clear evening, you can watch the sun paint the sky a fluorescent orange streaked with gold just before it pulls the grey cover of dusk over its head. There's so much parking available close by and the prices are so easy on the wallet that you can't believe you are in Fairfield County. And the food is surprisingly good! We say "surprisingly" because when we think of harborside restaurants, we remember overly sweet cocktails and fried clams on a Kaiser roll like those that were served at the popular Peter's Clam Bar in Long Beach, Long Island. With its nicely balanced menu, Saltwater Grille will quickly dissuade you of those preconceptions.

Of course, there are the prerequisites of a restaurant where boaters can dock and sup: a raw bar offering oysters, clams and shrimp cocktail; familiar favorites like a wedge of cold iceberg lettuce cradling a torrent of crumbled blue cheese; and always a new darling, in this case, macaroni and cheese tweaked just enough with peas and ham to keep it from being boring. A little "must-have" a little "expected" and a little "trendy" gives us a restaurant for all seasons. But what we like best about Saltwater's kitchen are its simple preparations of super-fresh fish and of meats that have some oomph to them. Nothing is more frustrating than eating a piece of steak that tastes like, well, like cardboard.

You leave Saltwater remembering the meltingly tender short ribs sinking into a mound of mashed potatoes and the creamy halibut sporting a crisp toupee of potatoes and onions that have been fried before being placed on the fish on its way to its coronation in the oven. A sauce of morels and asparagus adds notes of intensity.

You remember the little touches that bring a sprightly step to the dishes, like the crisped slice of apple perking up the salmon, the moat of diced spring vegetables encircling an assertive crab, the ponzu drizzle with the tuna sashimi, the merlot-infused butter exciting a tuna steak, and the grilled linguica sausage encouraging the lobster to speak with more animation. Well-seasoned tuna waltzes with spaetzle (a very nice unexpected pairing) with asparagus cloaked in browned tempura batter.

You think you're going to have prep-school fish and chips but what is presented before you is tender milky-white cod bathed in tempura batter that is so much lighter than a roll in flour. The feather-light result is tender inside its snappy coat.

Chef Jason Milanese's skirt steak is so flavorful you guess right when you take your first bite – it's Black Angus beef. Roasted tomato soup, with a hint of wine and thickened slightly with cream, holds a tiny surprise of micro greens and thimble-size cherry tomatoes. Milanese knows when to leave a good thing alone, so when he has vine-ripened tomatoes, he layers them simply with buffalo mozzarella, seasons them with a sprinkling of sea salt and crowns them with micro green and a swirl of fennel. Some dishes beg to be shared, which is often the case with first courses. Three such starters are chicken "lollipops" (puh-leez, what a description!), which are simply the meaty portion of the chicken wing with a bit of skin removed from the end and the top part rolled in a sweet, gooey, red barbecue sauce; steamy mussels and, everyone's favorite, fried calamari.

The starters are sensibly sized, which was a good thing one night when we had yet to work through the entrees, all of which are huge portions. (We went home with doggie bags.) Of course, we had already devoured out hot cheddar popovers and sipped our French Brandy 75 cocktails, but we won't go into that.

Keeping in mind that Saltwater Grille does not pretend to be a haute cuisine French restaurant or aspire to be one, its food is perfectly matched to theme and site, and generally quite pleasing. There were, however, some minor glitches, like the unfortunately overcooked soft-shell crab one evening with a bread coating thicker than the shellfish. Yet, we particularly liked its accompanying broth with diced vegetables that softened the harshness of the stiff crab.

Desserts here are true people-pleasers, one of which we defy anyone to finish: a trio of plump profiteroles, each encasing an ice-cream-parlor-size scoop of espresso ice cream and sloppily drenched with a chocolate glaze. A more finessed presentation and perhaps smaller pouches would have been a perfect ending to a delightful evening.

Other desserts are more refined, particularly the berry tasting plate: a tiny strawberry shortcake and a small ramekin of hot berry cobbler that pastry chef Sarah Meyer does to perfection. In the center of the plate is a pistachio tuile cupping vanilla gelato. The strawberry pistachio napoleon, handsome in execution, is unfortunately overpowered by the puff pastry, but the crème brulee is satisfying, as always. Meyer sends it out with a spoonful of blueberries.

Only days into its opening, Saltwater Grille was proving to be very popular with all age groups. The thirtysomethings hover near the bar, which can get jammed three to four deep, waiting for tables or just meeting for drinks. The lower deck, the place to be

when weather permits, is so coveted that reservations for this area are not offered – or so we were told several times over the course of a few visits. After we were advised that the deck was strictly “walk-in, table availability,” we were surprised on two occasions to see reserved tables (marked by a bottle of wine). Not all outdoor are graced by a Voss umbrella, so be forewarned if you choose to dine when the sun is still high, and bring a baseball cap.

Service is generally excellent, with one busboy perpetually circling the tables, indoors and out, with a frosty pitcher of water. No request is too much for the wait staff to handle, although early on, waiters would forget little things like a humble glass of Coke. Tables inside are linen-draped and close together, so ask for a table far from the madding crowd (although the happy din and music will follow you wherever you go).

The Saltwater team is obviously making every effort so diners are comfortable, from the white plastic sofas on the lower deck where you can sit and imbibe and also eat to the upper lounge where you can enjoy after-dinner drinks and a cup of coffee. The wine list is short and perfectly adequate for the food, with a few choices for wine by the glass.

Saltwater Grille is definitely a destination spot overlooking the Harbor Plaza Marina. If, after dinner, you feel a need to walk, a boardwalk on one side is just right for stretching your legs. Once occupied by the Rusty Scupper and later Waldy Malouf’s Beacon, the space is more attractive and inviting today. Sometimes you don’t want all the fuss and mist; sometimes you just want to relax, enjoy a simple meal well-prepared and not break the bank. Sometimes location isn’t everything – but it helps.