

The Stamford Advocate

July 12, 2007

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Though the former restaurant has been gone for 10 years, the directions to this new place remain "it's where the Rusty Scupper was." And then everyone nods knowingly and almost reverently. The Rusty Scupper was no great shakes as a restaurant, and it had nothing particularly interesting to drink. But it had panache and was the gathering place for the Stamford area.

Not since the demise of the Rusty Scupper has there been a restaurant here that had a chance of making it in an out-of-the-way albeit waterfront and beautiful location. Saltwater Grille has all the right elements to end the curse. That's because of the savvy managers, whose collective experiences include the highly successful Match in SoNo, Grand and Morton's The Steak House, both in Stamford. The formula is simple – take a great location (think water view and parking), and make it such a happening place that folks will flock to it. Dining palates have come a long way since the Rusty Scupper, so the new place also needs attention to food and a good wine list, both of which are part of the repertoire of these knowledgeable managers.

The expansive space has great views from the bi-level dining rooms, the bar and especially the large outdoor deck. Renovations fine-tuned the ambiance to highlight a large, boisterous bar that is packed nearly every night. Though the bar is noisy, the dining tables – even though not far away – are quiet and private enough for good conversation. Private dining rooms afford the ability to host parties or meetings, and a separate marketing and special event staff books these events, an essential concept for a restaurant of this size.

Service is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well-meaning, though there are a few time lapses due to the sheer numbers of patrons possible to be there at one time. Still, the place is such fun that a little slow-down is not a bad thing.

The menu is geared to both the nibbling and serious dining clientele. A broad selection of raw bar, salad and substantial appetizers are almost meals in themselves, especially couple with the complementary giant warm cheese popover that arrives shortly after the menu. And since the desserts are tempters – from Sarah Meyer, who cut her sweet tooth at the famed Aux Delices pastry shop, a starter and a finale can make a full dinner here.

Indeed, though the main courses are interesting and some are quite terrific, the starters are the standouts. Some are updates on classic American bistro fare, such as wine-steamed mussels with a hit of mustard in the sauce, or salt-and-pepper-crust

crisp fried calamari tossed with jalapeno slivers and served with a spicy tomato dipping sauce. Chicken "lollipops" are a BBQ take on Buffalo wings with a sweet-and sour apple glaze on moist, meaty wings and a fresh, though rather bland coleslaw. The calamari have more kick than normal, and the wings are for tamer palates. Grilled diver scallops on a red pepper and fennel relish are colorful and contemporary while the house version of mac and cheese with ham and peas is updated home cooking. Tuna sashimi with star anise pickles, wasabi oil and a ponzu dribble is exotic, while a hefty snack of juicy "Philly cheese-steak" heaped on a thick slice of country bread is a new take on an American classic.

Regularly listed soups included onion with Gruyere croutons, but even more interesting is roasted asparagus bisque. The thick, roughly pureed caramelized asparagus is a muddy green after grilling, but one slurp of the richly flavored soup awash in sautéed leeks and sweet crab livened with a drizzle of lemon oil and you will soon have the entire large bowl finished.

The raw bar includes all of the expected oysters, clams, shrimp, and crab cocktail choices, and salads. Salads are imaginative takes on the usual greens, such as tomato and mozzarella presented as a terrine, romaine with goat cheese and pistachios, crab and shrimp with chili mayo, and a BLT salad sided with a soft poached egg.

Main Courses also run the gamut from a light and crispy version of fish and chips to a wood grilled Maine lobster with vanilla butter and grilled linguica sausage. Apple-roasted salmon is a bit sweet for my taste, but my companion loved the caramelized edge and crunchy fennel salad. Grilled tuna steak is a huge hunk, crusted in sesame and seared to a blackened edge and rare interior, then set atop lightly herbed spaetzle and drizzled with merlot infused butter. The accompanying tempura asparagus are heavy and unnecessary. Other marine menu options include fettuccine with rock shrimp and roasted red peppers in a rose sauce, or roasted day-boat cod in a saffron tomato broth with Maine potatoes.

Non-seafood choices are double-cut pork chop over maple sweet potatoes, sirloin and potatoes Bearnaise, braised short ribs, or roast chicken with mashed potatoes, gravy and corn relish. A verbal recitation of daily specials augments the regular menu.

Pastry chef [Sarah Meyer]'s desserts unfailingly showcase a real talent for flavor combinations and whimsical presentations. A rather classic molten chocolate cake is perched on a bittersweet cocoa nib tuile and served with vanilla bean ice cream. Pristine vanilla creme brulee is paired with a colorful summer fruit salad, profiteroles are filled with espresso ice cream, and a poached peach is set on a buttery sable crust and served in a pool of lavender creme brulee. Chocolate genoise layers are sandwiches

with caramel and chocolate mousses. Our favorite is a seasonal berry tasting plate with a tiny individual berry cobbler (which would have been even better slightly warmed), a mini strawberry shortcake with sponge cake layers, and vanilla gelato served in a small pistachio tuile. It's pretty as a picture, and tastes like the essence of summer.

Saltwater Grille is young and enthusiastic. With a bit of maturity, it will have a long life here.