

“SHERIDAN SAYS”

EAST HAMPTON STAR

By Sheridan Sansegundo

Perhaps the most memorable impression we carried away from a meal at the 1770 House last weekend was one of soothing relaxation. The whole evening had been seductively easy from start to finish - cosseting service, little surprises, fine food, charming decor and presentation, a comfortable sound level - in just the way a special meal in the Hamptons should be, but so often isn't. The old house has been given an overhaul but without removing any of its intimate and historical charm. Its small dining room, with old wood tables, soft lighting, and Oriental rugs, is a delight. Judging by the battalions of vans and pickups that snarled traffic on Dayton Lane for months, the kitchen renovation was much more radical. That means the owners are surely in this for the long haul and must have carefully mapped out the demographics of their clientele in advance. They are high rollers.

I say that because, bucking the trend of lower prices we saw last year, the 1770 House is expensive. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise when one learns that the chef, Kevin Penner, was lured away from the Star Room in Wainscott, last season's priciest newcomer, though also the one with the best food. Wines are \$9 to \$15 a glass and there is nothing under \$32 by the bottle, and precious little under \$50, though the list is certainly impressive, with, for example, 10 different vintages of Chateau d'Yquem offered at pudding time. Appetizers, nine of them, start at \$11 for a mesclun salad, and most are \$16, with roasted foie gras being \$23. (Don't even ask about the market price caviar.) Roast chicken is \$26 and salmon is \$28 but the other seven entrees are over \$30, with grilled rib-eye steak topping out at \$39.

With that out of the way, we can talk about nicer things, like the woven baskets, the immaculate presentation on elegant square white dishes, or the perfect amuse bouche of lobster salad on a slice of cucumber that was brought to each of us when we were seated - a single bite of summer perfection. And talking about summer, if you try the 1770 House's Bellinis - champagne mixed with the fresh juice of white South Fork peaches - it will chase away the thought of Labor Day. The dressings on all three salads we tried were exceptional, but the mesclun was a little overwhelmed by a fierce blue cheese. The heirloom tomato salad, on the other hand, was extraordinary - dream tomatoes, tomatoes that tasted the way they did when the world was young and the refrigerated truck uninvented.

Each constituent of the baby arugula salad was also perfect - the prosciutto, the wafers of pecorino cheese, the walnuts in the dressing, but there was so much of the good stuff in ratio to the arugula that it was more an antipasto than a salad. And then there were two

unusual appetizers: two curls of breaded and fried Dover sole with a caviar remoulade and a square of braised fresh pork belly with Asian greens, lobster mushrooms, and a sweet, spicy sauce - sounds a little weird but it was a knockout.

Someone else who had visited the restaurant said the striped bass was the best entree, and we had to agree. It was cooked very simply and served with a mixture of baby bok choy and spring onions over a sticky, almost sweet rice. There was a pile of green curry sauce, but it was a third wheel - the dish needed nothing more.

From the meat dishes, we chose the roast chicken, which, although it came with a lot of exciting accessories such as little puffy potatoes and a spicy corn relish, was a little dry. The person who ordered the \$39 rib-eye likes his steak medium to well done. Had the steak been rare, maybe it would have been wonderful. As it was, it was on the chewy side. But, like our other quibbles, our complaints were minor and made partly because Mr. Penner seldom puts a foot wrong. But the lamb (\$33) was superb, and a more generous helping than is customary. It was a wonderfully successful dish served with Jerusalem artichokes, olives, and slow-baked tomatoes in a garlic and rosemary sauce. Our last entree was the lobster risotto (\$36). The risotto was perfectly cooked and intense in flavor and there was lots, and I mean lots, of lobster piled on top of it. Our table was slightly in disagreement, some of us raving about it and others, well, me, actually, finding the flavors of saffron and fennel together to be a bit overwhelming.

While the presentation of all the dishes was beautiful, the desserts were breathtaking, each one accompanied by a contrasting sorbet or ice cream. It may be a cliché by now, but a great warm chocolate cake with a melting middle can't be beat, and the 1770 House's is great. The blueberry financier was . . . a blueberry muffin, pretty much. Not exciting. The delicate steamed lemon pudding was close to perfection but left a slightly bitter aftertaste. The 1770 House is a place to put on your special occasion list. A place to go when you want to be pampered and spoiled and given delicate and imaginative dishes that arrive looking like Christmas presents.



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