

Dining Out – September 22, 2002

NEWSDAY

“THE 1770 HOUSE”

*By Peter Gianotti*

The 1770 House is elegantly reborn in 2002 as the showcase of chef Kevin Penner.

Penner, the original chef at Della Femina and The Star Room, here completes his culinary hat trick in a charming, very old and very new place.

Through the years, the vintage inn has hosted eateries sporting dishes as different as Senate bean soup and monkfish foie gras. Penner makes all that seem like fast food.

His performance takes place on a carefully fashioned stage, currently framed by Christofle tableware and Laguiole cutlery. The set is in hues of cream, with accents architectural and antique, tropical and modern. Overhead, exposed beams underscore the inn's longevity. The handsome wood tables suggest another era, too. Wicker brings in a country touch.

Penners' eclectic cuisine and ever-changing menu are a fine balance of subtle and bold, full of harmonious, East-West interplay. Begin with a decidedly Eastern approach: meltingly tender braised pork belly, atop Asian greens, sparked by a sweet Thai chile sauce.

Continue in that direction with vivid, chopped raw tuna, precisely molded, served with a radish salad, soy sauce and juice from yazu, a Japanese fruit that hints of grapefruit and mandarin orange.

Move westward with a slab of roasted Hudson valley foie gras, balanced at the other side of the rectangular plate with a blueberry pancake and vanilla essence, an unexpected coupling that works.

Enjoy salads. The selections include an Italianate union of baby arugula, fava beans, prosciutto, pecorino cheese and walnuts in a lemon - black pepper vinaigrette; another of heirloom tomatoes, yellow and red, with ricotta salata, micro - greens and a garlic - caper vinaigrette; and a third, the savory alliance of mache, endive, Maytag blue cheese, Charentais melon, bacon, candied walnuts and sherry vinaigrette. A lot of the sourdough and olive-stuffed rolls will have vanished by the course.

Roasted Maine diver scallops arrive with chanterelles, peas and a rush of thyme. They're plump and delectable. Risotto Milanese goes lavishly local with Montauk lobster, plus fennel, garlic and basil. But the rice stays a bit firmer than necessary and the ingredients don't quite meld.

Montauk striped bass is deftly roasted and turned Provencal with tomatoes, rosemary, sweet basil essence and a gratin of Nicoise olives. But it seems almost common compared with the eastbound, sweet skate wing, a seductive number with black rice, and a marvelous green curry sauce that adds an undercurrent of heat.

Turbot is roasted, sauced with tomato - and - tarragon, joined by pea shoots and chate-relles. Miso - glazed Scottish salmon swims farther across the border with wasabi sauce, hearts of palm, mango and scallion salad.

Thai yellow curry sauce fuels rosy, grilled squab. The bird receives an added tingle from the company of spicy kimchi and mango. It's a stirring, striking combination.

The grilled loin of Colorado lamb is exceptional, seasoned with rosemary and emboldened by sweet garlic, cured olives and tomatoes. The hefty grilled rib-eye of beef rests on a snowy potato puree, and is defined by its vinous sauce Bordelaise.

Desserts are artful affairs. The caramelized banana tart finds a foil in toasted - almond ice cream. Steamed lemon pudding is matched with lemon confit and raspberry sorbet.

Buttermilk panna cotta has nectarine salad on one side, peach sorbet on the other, strands of basil weaving a bridge of sorts. The satisfying wild Maine blueberry financier is improved by vanilla ice cream and a blueberry coulis. Valrhona chocolate ice cream is the mate of warm chocolate cake.

You'll want to linger over these sweets, or the cheese plate with that Charentais melon and white truffle honey. Perhaps decide on which vintage of Chateau d'Yquem sings to you, or whether a glass of vintage Port will do. Maybe consider sherry or grappa, Cognac or Calvados. Expect attentive, expert service throughout.

All this activity, of course, will result in your giving a very personal boost to the regional economy. But you'll also know very quickly that you've spent more for less elsewhere.



143 MAIN STREET. EAST HAMPTON NY, 11937  
631-324-1770