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Second Helpings

News Journal dining critics Patricia Talorico and Eric Ruth dish about their oh-so-difficult job of dining at the area's finest -- and not so fine -- restaurants. Get a behind-the-scenes look at their experiences and what they left out of their reviews as well as scoops on what's happening in the local restaurant scene. Feel free to ask Patricia or Eric questions or for recommendations.

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

City Restaurant Week: Domaine Hudson | 5:24 PM

By PETER BOTHUM

As a kid I was the pickiest eater on the planet. As an adult it's almost impossible to disappoint me as a diner.

In fact, these days it's pretty easy to please both my wife - my lunch date Wednesday - and myself.

Our time is crunched like a used coffee creamer by two jobs and two little girls. Suffice it to say, we don't often go to classy joints like Domaine Hudson Wine Bar and Eatery, so the only thing that could happen was Dining Nirvana.

And it did.

Even on Hump Day, smack in the middle of City Restaurant Week, Domaine Hudson was on its A-game, serving up the culinary equivalent of a Michael Jordan crossover or a Prince guitar solo at this \$15, two-course prix fixe lunch.

The baked brie and arugula starter salad was like therapy for this indecisive diner. It didn't matter how you paired its ingredients - any mixture of the pears, walnuts, baked brie (slightly crusty on the outside, warm and pliable on the inside) or the roasted shallot vinaigrette got the taste buds in shape for the edible brilliance about to unfold. I wanted to go with something classy, like the sauteed rainbow trout over puy lentils, but I followed my stomach's hunger for meat over to the 3-ounce spice rubbed flat iron steak and romaine hearts.

The spice rub smacked with all the flavor you needed, but gently brushing some of the melt-in-your-mouth, rare-cooked meat into into the Roquefort vinaigrette or red onion provided a powerful, unexpected kick.

My wife reported that her seared scallop tagliatelle boasted just the right amount of doneness, and the accompanying shallot cream over semolina pasta was muscular without coming off too heavy.

The dessert, however, was heavenly. At our waiter's recommendation we went with the Polenta Poundcake, which was topped with fresh pineapple, whipped cream and coconut.

But wait just a second. Back to that polenta, whose cornmeal-batter goodness - dense, but still airy - could have stood on its own. By adding a little warmth on the inside, and allowing a little of that pineapple juice to get soaked up in the cake, and coating it with that rich cream and a hint of coconut taste for good measure, and Domaine Hudson made the dessert soar.

Mission accomplished. We have reached Dining Nirvana.

Labels: City Restaurant Week, Wilmington dining

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