

Chart House Back In Ship Shape

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For The Sunday Challenger
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Great Views, Great Menu Return to Newport

"God made mango to go with avocado and crab," my wife Alicia said after her first bite of the Chart House appetizer that included those select ingredients.

Though she doesn't normally like fruit mixed with her fish or meats, this was an exception. The dish was layered and stacked high - flavorful, fresh - served on a beautiful, oversized plate.

It was our 10th wedding anniversary. Traditionally to celebrate, we choose a place where we know we'll have a good experience so as not to tarnish the special occasion. But we'd heard good things about the Chart House and this appetizer set the tone for the rest of the night.

The Mood

The Chart House reopened this fall following a major renovation. The restaurant is owned by Texas-based Landry's, which also owns the nearby Joe's Crab Shack. The money spent on the remodel is visible throughout the restaurant. Upon entering through the two towering, 15-foot doors, diners can look past the hostess station directly through the dining area to one of the best views in the city. The tiered dining room floor and full-length windows surrounding the restaurant guarantee that each table has an excellent view. Despite all that openness, the lighting and décor make it intimate.

The Chart House invested in tables large enough to allow diners to relax. The table didn't feel overpopulated with dishes. There was also room between the tables to afford privacy. Too often, diners feel like they have to include the couple sitting next to us in their conversation, but the Chart House afforded us that precious space. In a business where profit margins are thin, it must be tempting to squeeze in a few more tables. They didn't fall victim to that. I'll gladly pay a couple bucks more. Finally, since my wife and I were planning on dancing later, it was pleasant that our hostess notice my wife's black dress and my black suit and quickly replaced our white napkins with black ones - no need for a lint brush. Little courtesies elevate a restaurant experience.

The Food

I was somewhat nervous at the sight of a salad bar on the way to the table, but after the appetizer I was willing to give it a try. Admittedly, this was the first salad bar I'd been to that served caviar. Though not my favorite, a 10th anniversary makes you feel decadent and I sampled a few spoonfuls of the salty roe. Hearts of palm and artichoke salad elevated the more traditional salad bar fare.

The best part of the salad bar was the hand-tossed-to-order Caesar salad. With no chance that it could sit around and wilt, the salad was vibrant and crunchy.

After building our salads we settled in for a nice meal.

The delightful general category of surf-and-turf is raised to pure joy at the Chart House, with a filet mignon cooked medium rare topped with the lump crab and shrimp topping. The chefs aren't limited to seafood. They know how to cook a steak to order. The delicate richness of the crab and shrimp perfectly complimented the tender cut of beef. The roasted garlic mashed potatoes were a perfect accompaniment, garnished with these French fried sweet potatoes.

Though not much of a seafood man, but liking the firmness of mahi mahi, I tried the Macadamia Crushed Mahi Mahi. However, the preparation gave me pause. I thought the macadamia would give it a crunchy bite, instead the peanut sauce reminded me of spicy Thai food that I wasn't up to. But the mango coulis only made me curious, so I plunged ahead, thinking of Virgil's words "Fortune favors the brave."

Though I was jealous of my wife's filet, the layers of flavor in the mahi mahi were astounding. Whether by design or providence, pools of each of the sauces seemed to have formed for dipping so I could counter on alternate bites the heavy sumptuousness of the peanut sauce with the mango sauce. Although I flirted with the filet by stealing a few bites, I was always drawn back to my fish.

For Dessert



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CITY ON VIEW: The tiered dining room and full-length windows surrounding the restaurant guarantee that each table has an excellent view.

Heading the menu's time warning and unaware of the meal ahead of us, we had put in an order for the only dessert on the menu. The Hot Chocolate Lava Cake is a small fresh baked cake with a hot center of Godiva chocolate liqueur topped with vanilla ice cream drenched in warm chocolate sauce with a Heath Bar crumbed over it. It was overindulgence, but 10 years called for it.

My wife and I floated out of the restaurant with the intention of heading out for dancing. The meal was only to be prelude to a longer evening of celebration, but instead we kicked off our shoes, uncorked our annual bottle of Mondoro Asti. We know when to quit when we're ahead, and a great meal at the Chart House was enough of a celebration.

The Chart House, 405 Riverboat Row, Newport, (859) 261-0300. Open for dinner, Sunday through Thursday 5 to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 to 11 p.m.

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