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Vintage Restaurant & Bar



The Club at Morgan Hill
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by Ira Faro

After 30 years of living in the ever-evolving Lehigh Valley, I have come to expect surprises when driving down roads I haven't traveled before. Cathey and I were in for several surprises the night we visited Vintage Bar and Restaurant at The Club at Morgan Hill.

We were surprised by the view of eastern Northampton County that greeted us as we climbed up Morgan Hill Road after turning off I-78 at the Route 611 exit. Lights twinkled in a panorama that must be impressive during daylight hours. We were surprised at the extent of the Woodland Hills townhouse and condominium community that lay before us as we turned down Clubhouse Drive—more than 300 units that looked as though they might have been transplanted from Staten Island. And the community's Web site failed to list a single unit up for sale and only one available for rent.

Fireside Ambiance

Perhaps the most unexpected surprise was the relative restraint of the Clubhouse in which Vintage Restaurant and Bar is located. It's not a castle-like structure like those overlooking the final holes at Scotland's storied links, not a faux plantation, as are many facilities here in the States. It is, however, comfortable and well appointed, decorated in soothing earth tones. A separate dining room behind French doors is enhanced with a tableside fireplace—the site of a private party the night that we visited. Wrought-iron chandeliers and accents add a homespun touch. A vaulted ceiling and open floor plan provide an airy feeling as well as a clear view of the televisions over the bar.

We began our dinner with an amusee, a tangy bruschetta on a crisp crostini, and a look at the menu and the wine list. The menu is best described as American with continental influences. There's a focus on beef, from a grilled ranch steak appetizer to the 24-ounce Porterhouse entrée, but there is a sufficient variety of meat, fish, and fowl to suit just about any taste. And the wine list is interesting and varied; less of a French focus than is customary, but with South America, Spain, and other regions coming into their own, that's okay.

I began with pan-seared Hudson Valley foie gras with apple cider preserves, lingonberry reduction, and moscato cream. For the first time in the States, my foie gras was properly presented on a thin slice of buttermilk French toast. I had to ask about the crunchies swimming in the cream. They were fried pancetta. Just perfect. Cathey's mushroom gratin with chestnuts, gruyere, and truffle oil was flamed at the table with Bacardi 101. It was not exactly as described per menu, but tasty nonetheless. She would have liked a spoon to sip the broth; a small omission.

Game on

I don't ordinarily order a dinner salad, but I'm a sucker for lamb. The grilled lamb loin chop and ratatouille on frisée with herbed red wine vinaigrette intrigued me. It was as good as it sounded; there was enough for Cathey to enjoy a couple of forkfuls and the ratatouille, normally stewed as a vegetable side dish for an entrée, was a fitting crisp accompaniment to the fresh greens. Cathey chose the pan-seared red snapper with white asparagus, light garlic and thyme broth, and grilled bruschetta for her main course. The snapper was sweet and properly prepared. I tried the chestnut-crust rack of venison with pan-seared red bliss potatoes and pearl onions, French beans, and cranberry gastrique. The venison had a pleasant game taste without tasting gamey. I gnawed the bones.

Take particular note that we weren't presented with a standard, one-size-fits-all vegetable medley, but that each course was constructed with sides that complemented the entrée. That's not often enough the case these days, and earns two big thumbs up from Cathey and me.

The dessert menu did not disappoint. The Chocolate Trio presented me with a chocolate Grand Marnier truffle (clean reduction), molten chocolate cake (cocoa rich), and chocolate espresso mousse (creamy clean through). Cathey helped out more than usual.

We each enjoyed a glass of wine with dinner and Cathey finished with an Irish coffee. The bill with well-earned service totaled \$145.

Vintage is just over two years old and, to be honest, there remain a kink or two to work out, but the service was bright, cheerful, and attentive. My guess is that the view is spectacular when it stays light late in the summer. And the quality of the food and its preparation is top-notch. Folks who treasure fine dining will treasure Vintage.

Chef Mike Pichetto



As a teenage bus boy at a high-traffic restaurant in northern New Jersey, Mike



Pichetto always liked the back of the house, constantly asking to be put on the line. One day he got his wish, and was thrown in as a replacement for a fired expeditor. During the hustle of getting out more than 400 covers that night, there were times when Pichetto wasn't certain that he'd made the right choice. But he stuck it out, and the rest is history.

Pichetto trained on the job, never attending culinary school. He worked his way up the ladder until a 12-year turn with the Marriott chain allowed him to save enough capital to open Vintage with partner and sommelier Rebecca Kling. "I worked my way west along I-78 all the way to Easton," says Pichetto. Pichetto calls his style rustic American with touches of provincial French and northern Italian. The menu changes with the seasons, though not as often as the wine list, and there are few nightly specials. Customers know what to expect; they return often and Pichetto, who enjoys working the room, frequently visits their tables.

It should be noted that the night Cathey and I visited, Pichetto wasn't in the house and Greg, a young Northampton Community College culinary graduate, was in charge of the kitchen. The skill with which Pichetto's menu was realized is a testament to NCC's program and Pichetto's leadership.