

SPECIALTY RESTAURANT REVIEW:

LUNCH AT TODD ENGLISH

on Cunard's Queen Mary 2

by

Richard H. Wagner

Quite frankly, when I heard that the Todd English specialty restaurant on Queen Mary 2 had changed its lunch menu, I was somewhat disappointed. The previous menu had been the best that I had encountered there since the ship went into service in 2004. It contained a number of favorites that I looked forward to re-acquainting myself with whenever I came aboard.

My disappointment proved unfounded, however, as the current menu exceeds its predecessor. Furthermore, Oliver Lao, the maitre d' hotel, has brought the service to a peak level.

The printed menu is rather deceptive. The description of the various dishes is terse, listing a few ingredients or mentioning one of the side items that come along with the dish in question. Moreover, the dishes often have names that sound like the names that one often finds on a lunch menu in more commonplace

restaurants. What one comes to learn, however, is that Chef Todd English, who develops the recipes for this seagoing version of his restaurant, has his own take on each of these dishes that takes them far beyond the ordinary. While it may be disconcerting at first to have a dish placed in front of you that is not at all what you expected from its name, the dishes are so inventive and interesting that one quickly forgives the playfulness of the menu listing.

In the appetizer selections, the Fig and Prosciutto Flat Bread stands out. From the menu, one might think that it is a plate of fruit, ham and bread. However, the dish turns out to be more akin to a gourmet pizza. The flat bread serves as the crust and the paper thin prosciutto rests on top of a layer of gorgonzola cheese. Intermixed with a fig puree, each bite is a contrast of the pungency of the cheese and the sweetness of the puree. The bread is light and does not intrude.

The menu also presents two pasta selections - - Ricotta Ravioli and Tortellini of Butternut Squash - - which guests can have as an appetizer or as a main dish. These are more subtle items; not over-powering in their flavors; good but not outstanding.

The main courses are where the playfulness in the menu becomes most apparent. My favorite is the Grilled Steak Cobb. It is not like any other Cobb salad. Yes, there is lettuce, bits of bacon, cheese and hard-boiled egg but the centerpiece is a full size steak cut into large pieces. The beef has been treated with spices making it very flavorful. These spices play against the avocado cream, the tomato jam and the more traditional salad elements.

Another flavorful dish is the Roasted Leg of Lamb Gyro. This is not at all like the gyro one finds in diners. The thinly sliced lamb is wrapped together with lettuce, onion and tomato along a skewer. Colorfully situated along side is a green pesto sauce, a white yogurt and a red tomato-based sauce. One uncovers a series of new flavors as one progresses through this sandwich.

The Olives Burger is reminiscent of the hamburger served at New York's 21 Club. It is very large and various spices have been mixed in with the ground beef. Because of its size, the burger can be undercooked toward the center.

Perhaps the most straight forward of the main entrees is the Pepper-crust Atlantic Salmon. This is what the menu says - - a large salmon fillet that has been cooked in a pepper sauce. The skin of the salmon is crisp while the meat is tender and juicy. As one often finds in Chef English's recipes, it is enhanced by an array of Mediterranean-inspired spices.

Turning to dessert, the star of the current menu is the Chocolate Fallen Cake. This is a rich but not heavy cake that is almost soufflé-like in consistency. Inside is a liquid dark chocolate. The cake is served with a vanilla ice cream that balances the chocolate richness. The ice cream also contrasts with the tanginess of the raspberry sauce that is poured artistically on the plate in the shape of a sail.

An alternative selection is the Wild Maine Blueberry Cobbler. Here, the recipe stays close to the traditional New England dish. The berries are slightly tart and contrast well against the crust of the cobbler and the accompanying vanilla ice cream. It is warm and



The Todd English

fresh and serves as a nice balance against the spiciness of the earlier courses.

One should not approach lunch at Todd English with the idea that it will be a light meal that will hold you over until dinner. The portions tend to be generous and the recipes are demanding of the palate. For many this will serve as the main meal of the day. However, it is a culinary adventure that is worth undertaking.

The Todd English is open for lunch on sea days. A \$20 cover charge applies.