

SPECIALTY RESTAURANT REVIEW:

CHOPS GRILLE

on Royal Caribbean's Enchantment of the Seas

by

Richard H. Wagner

Every cruise ship specialty restaurant competes with the ship's main dining room. To entice guests to pay the additional cover charge when a meal in the main dining room is already included in the price of the cruise, the specialty restaurant must offer a better dining experience, a different type of dining experience or both. On Enchantment of the Seas, the specialty restaurant faces a challenge because the dinners in the main dining room are exceptionally good.

The main dining room on Enchantment is called the "My Fair Lady Restaurant." Keying off the famous musical, the two-level room is decorated to recall the elegance of upper class Britain in the late 19th century/early 20th century. At the base of the sweeping staircase that connects the upper and lower levels is a statue

that looks like Audrey Hepburn did in the movie version of the musical. On the walls are sketches depicting scenes from that era. Although it is a large room, it is not overpowering. Rather, it has an elegant feel to it.

Service in such a large restaurant very much depends upon which waiter is assigned to your table. For dinner, I was fortunate to have an outstanding waiter who goes by the name Edwin. He combined friendliness with efficiency. He made recommendations as to the various menu items, was willing to bring seconds and strove to accommodate the guests' requests. Orders were taken and the food arrived promptly but at no time did we feel rushed.

For breakfast and dinner, My Fair Lady is

open seating so I had the opportunity to experience the service by other waiters. Some were very good, some were average. However, dinner was always a pleasure.

Although the chefs are cooking for more than a thousand guests at each dinner seating, the food was also quite good. In particular, they handled the various beef dishes, e.g., roast beef, strip steak, top sirloin, well. They were flavorful and arrived at the table cooked as ordered. The Indian dishes were quite good as well, successfully avoiding the blandness that often plagues Indian cuisine on cruise ships.

Thus, My Fair Lady deserves high marks for atmosphere, service and food.

At this time, the only specialty restaurant on Enchantment is Chops Grille. (More specialty restaurants may be added when the ship goes in for a major drydock in December 2012). Chops Grille is an American-style steakhouse. Usually referred to as "Chops" both by the crews and regular passengers, there are Chops on most but not all Royal Caribbean ships.

On Enchantment, Chops is located on Deck Six on the port side. One wall is floor-to-ceiling glass windows. The decor is contemporary, dominated by earth tones. Overall, the atmosphere reminded me of a sophisticated urban restaurant in a glass skyscraper. You could imagine business people celebrating the closing of some important deal in such a setting.

The room, of course, is much smaller than My Fair Lady. In addition, it is divided into sections by wood and smoked glass partitions. As a result, the restaurant has a more intimate atmosphere than the main dining room.

Thus, Chops has a different dining atmosphere than the main dining room. This

makes it attractive as a change of pace, particularly on longer cruises.

I made my reservation for a time equivalent to the second seating in the main dining room. By that time, only a few tables were occupied. It was also a casual night. (As with most cruise ship specialty restaurants, I was told that the most crowded nights for Chops are the formal nights).

Service throughout the meal was very good. The waitress was friendly and the various courses arrived promptly

Several of my fellow passengers had described the steaks at this Chops as the best they had ever eaten. With such high praise and given my experience with the dishes in the main dining room, I had high expectations. So I ordered the 10 ounce filet mignon. (I often order this cut because I find it the most tender and flavorful and because it allows me to compare one specialty restaurant with another).

I ordered the filet medium but it arrived medium well. It was still very tender but the flavor came from the two sauces, a green peppercorn sauce and a Bearnaise sauce. These were quite good and made the meal.

Having dined at Chops on other ships, I was delighted to encounter some familiar friends. The warm loaf of bread before the start of the meal and the Dungeness Crab and Shrimp Cake are always tasty.

There is a \$30 cover charge for dinner at Chops Grille.