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Dining with the Dudleys



Dev's On Bank Street

Derek and I have just been to Dev's in New London and, as much as we'd like to keep the place to ourselves, we figured it was incumbent on us to tell our readers about how much we enjoyed our visit. We're hard put to think of many places that are better suited to meeting with friends and/or family and enjoying fine, innovative cuisine and excellent service in a friendly, casual atmosphere.

Located in the venerable brick building that most recently housed The Tavern and Ye Olde Tavern before that, Dev's has a warm, inviting ambience, that - while a tad noisy, nevertheless provides a charming backdrop for some truly memorable meals.

Dev's pays homage to the Spanish institution of light tavern fare by featuring a Tapas menu but the selection does not limit itself to the dishes one might expect. Rather, it melds the Oriental influences with European, Mediterranean and even American dishes with wonderful results.

A great example of what they offer can be had in the form of the Spanish Dim Sum which leads the list on the Tapas menu. This delightful selection comes to the table beautifully presented on one large square platter along with several accessory plates, a ramekin of a soy based sauce and ceramic spoons. Carefully arranged on this platter are two each of crab cakes, steamed Oriental vegetable dumplings, crispy pork meatballs and toasted goat cheese served on crispy rounds of toast. The presentation is so charming, in fact, that I could see Derek's momentary reluctance to disturb the scene by taking one of the crab cakes he obviously longed for. Like I said it was "momentary". Once he'd taken the plunge it was all I could do to stop him from gobbling up the entire platter.

The crab cakes were on the smaller side but they were delicious. Crispy on the outside and topped with a tasty remoulade they were the first thing we ate. The dumplings were divine - perfect little gems filled with chopped vegetables steamed to perfection and topped with an outrageously tasty sweet chili Thai sauce. As my son might say, "they'll knock your socks off"

The crispy pork meatballs were no less delicious and innovative. They were served in the hollows of two Chinese ceramic spoons and meant for dipping in the soy based sauce in the ramekin. They were wrapped in what appeared to be a



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few strands of linguine before they were plunged into a deep fryer and the result was a crispy meatball clutched in crunchy strands of pasta. Cool! We loved them!

Then there was the toasted goat cheese - which, I admit, I was a little hesitant about before I tried one. I couldn't tell what to expect by looking at them - each topped with a single slice of blanched, then toasted almond. But they were superb! Warm, savory and creamy - they were a very nice contrast of flavors to the other items on the platter.

Next to arrive at our table was Derek's very generous serving of one of Dev's signature dishes, sweet corn and chorizo chowder. Having sampled this soup I can easily understand why it was voted #1 at New London's Octoberfest 2007. It's delicious! This smooth and creamy golden chowder is loaded with tender chunks of clam and their wonderful flavor blends so well with the chorizo sausage and corn. It's actually surprising for me how good this soup is - almost as if that's the way chowder should always be made. I know, I know - it's not traditional New England clam chowder - but it's GOOD.

Along with our meals came a little gift from the house for each of us - a small glass of white wine sangria topped with a toasted round of bread which was itself topped with a creamy pate of white bean and sun-dried tomato. A very tasty morsel indeed but the wine was fantastic! The host explained to us that it was made in house by mixing lemon, lime and orange with a Spanish Rioja wine. Derek and I are not big on drinking wine or any other alcoholic beverages for that matter - but hey, they brought it to us and I thoroughly enjoyed mine and half of Derek's as well.

Soon after the wine our delightful waitress Sarah brought out half of a smaller loaf of a delicious sweet brown bread still hot from the oven. She apologized for not bringing it out sooner - indeed it would have gone wonderfully well with that exquisite chowder - but she explained that the bread simply was not baked yet. Not much you can argue with there - OK it was late - but then it was as fresh as it gets and well worth waiting for.

Our entrees included house salads which were, like everything else so far: delicious and beautifully presented. They were a mixture of fresh baby greens topped with whisper thin slices of onion and tomato and tossed with a delightful balsamic vinaigrette. Nothing too fancy - just good stuff and oh so fresh.

Now our entrees themselves were a bit futher up the fancy scale. Again, the talented presentation of the dishes lent itself to the total experience - and the sum was divine!

Derek's grilled pork loin was a very generous and thick piece of lean pork, artfully grilled and topped with a glaze of quince and soy. It was so tender and delicious that I'm sure Derek will order that very same dish the next time we visit. He loved it! I got a chance to sample some and found it just as

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cont from page 15.

enticing as my husband did. It was served alongside a healthy dollop of "marbled potatoes" that were equally delicious. Just like I make them - mashed just enough and seasoned lightly so as not to mask the earthy goodness of the delicious potatoes themselves.

Flanking this beautiful piece of grilled pork loin and potatoes were a handful of fresh green beans attractively arranged in something of a trellis pattern. Tasty tidbits they were too - though Derek wanted more of them.

Well, he got them - from my plate. That's OK - I was too busy with one of the most delicious filets of salmon I've ever sampled. With the name "Oriental ginger and lime crusted salmon" I wasn't quite sure if it would be a little too "flavorful". Some restaurants seem to go out of their way to drown out the flavor of the salmon with exotic combinations of glazes and toppings. Though exotic, the preparation of this wonderful and generous piece of salmon was perfect - a subtly flavored blend of lime, ginger, Panko bread crumbs and a savory soy glaze - the delightful flavor of fresh salmon shone through all the more glorious for the care the chef put into it.

It was served leaning against an ample helping of fried rice with chunks of tomato and onion which was an excellent side dish to the salmon. While the rice was good enough to stand on its own - the flavors of the two dishes complemented each other very well. Derek also enjoyed helping himself to my rice...a little too much. But there was plenty so I didn't mind that much. Besides - I was saving at least *some* room for dessert!

There aren't too many items listed on the menu for dessert - flan, churros (a Spanish fried dough pastry) served with hot chocolate, or bananas Foster, but the waitress also mentioned a dish with chocolate and raspberry. Regrettably I can't recall what it was. In any event, what we did choose to share for dessert was far from forgettable. The bananas Foster was a delightful serving of creamy vanilla ice cream and chunks of banana topped with a warm buttery creamy sauce and whipped cream and served in a very large Martini glass. Holy cow it was good! Derek and I went at it with our spoons as if we hadn't eaten in weeks. Derek was still trying to get the last half a drop out of the bottom of the glass when our waitress brought us two fresh cups of an excellent decaffeinated coffee.

I don't know what it is - but many restaurants do a wonderful job with the meal then fall flat on their faces by serving a lousy cup of coffee. I admit we Dudleys don't make it any easier by ordering decaf - but still, you'd think that more restaurants would realize just how important a good cup of coffee is for so many diners and make sure that they served just that.

I'm happy to report that the coffee at Dev's was just fine. Rich and flavorful - it served as the perfect way to end a wonderful meal. We'll go back to Dev's soon. We hope to see you there!

