

Fine Dining has Gone to the Dogs!

By David Garrison

Yes, you heard it right: fine dining has gone to the dogs! We recently had the distinct pleasure of ravaging the menu at Southland Gaming & Racing's newest renovation, Bourbon Street Steakhouse and Grill in scenic West Memphis, Arkansas. They say that Arkansas is the only diamond producing state in the union. If that is the case, then this is another example of finding just such a gem of flawless quality.

There were four of us that gathered together that evening to put to the test Chef Tung Nguyen's skills. Director of Food and Beverage, Osi Imomoh, met us at the door of Bourbon Street with a big smile and open arms and ushered us to our table, all-the-while extolling the virtues of Southland's newest upscale amenity.

Once seated, we were immediately presented with a complimentary miniature Hurricane cocktail (Sex-on-the-beach) in honor of the pandemonium breaking loose in the Gulf. After all, it is Bourbon Street Steakhouse, a New Orleans theme where Pat O'Brian's originally made the Hurricane famous.

After a bit of joking with Osi, and with his recommendation, we decided to try almost everything on the menu! Well, in all seriousness, we were very hungry and everything looked so good ... so we started with the Starters: all of them. Why not? We were starved, I needed something to write about, and the price was definitely right!

I will tell you right now, superlatives failed me after the first few dishes! You cannot believe how good the food is at Bourbon Street Steakhouse and Grill; its quality and flavor is magnificent beyond compare. Moreover, the presentation is classy, but much fun and very enjoyable in an unpretentious atmosphere.

The Crawfish Bayou Tech was bronzed seared crawfish tails atop fried green tomatoes with a spicy Hollandaise sauce that made your eyes roll back in your head it was so delicious! The Blackened Beef Kabobs were two skewers chocked full of beef tenderloin bites blackened and served like crossed swords atop a pyre of shoestring onion fries.

Other must-haves were Classic New Orleans BBQ Shrimp; monsters fresh from the Gulf served with French bread and a remoulade sauce and Lafayette Sizzlin' Blue Crab Cakes made from fresh, lump crab meat and served in an iron skillet with Lafayette mango butter. Mmmmmmm!

Two other Starters gave us pause for thought, but we tried them anyway because we had faith in Chef Nguyen: the Lafourche Oysters on the Half Shell and the Cajun Tapas. The Lafourche Oysters were fresh oysters wrapped in Tasso ham and grilled over an open flame ... damn they were good ... and I hate oysters! The Cajun Tapas, on the other hand, was a combination plate of Fried Frog Legs, more Lafourche Oysters, more BBQ Shrimp, and Alligator Medallions! Oh my! They were good ... and not near enough to go around. Again, I gotta tell you, it was great, but you can see from the descriptions why we were shy. Trust me ... order EVERYTHING, you'll LOVE IT!

For our entrees, we stayed with the Simply Grilled portion of the menu, and though we were sorely tempted by several of the Chef's Specials, we only had so much tummy room. I went with the Chicken Sassafras which was temporarily replacing the Flame Grilled Chicken. The Chicken Sassafras is a dish created by F&B Manager Osi Imomoh that defies description. It makes your mouth riot in a cacophony of flavors. Every bite brings a new combination to your palate that makes you wide-eyed in wonder.

Once we fought over the Alligator in the Cajun Tapas, we decided unanimously on the Bayou Mixed Grill so we could fight over that, too! It is healthy portions of fresh Alligator medallions with grilled pork and beef tenderloins; a tasty trio of exotic tenderloins for the most discriminating meat lover.

If it is the old standbys you can't do without, we also devoured an 8oz filet and a 16oz New York Strip. The filet is their most tender cut of beef that you can cut with a fork and the NY Strip is aged 28 days and hand carved to order. Cooked perfectly, these two classics were mouth-watering in the extreme and not for the faint of heart.

Osi brought out jambalaya and red beans & rice to fill in the blank spots then we looked menacingly upon the dessert menu. What the heck, bring 'em all, right? We pounced like a pack of ravenous dogs on one Death by Chocolate, one Cheese Cake, one Bananas Foster, oh, and two Crème Brulets ... with coffee, of course.

Throw in a couple of glasses of very good wine (I liked the 14 Hands Chardonnay), tea and soda all around and you probably think this meal is financed by the national debt! Would you believe all of the

above was under \$300! As incredible as it sounds, as I recall it was only like \$260 or so. Everyone at the table guessed waaay above \$300 before the check came. Jaws dropped in unison when I read the damage with dismay in my voice.

There is no doubt in my mind that the very best bang for your buck and the very best food around has gone to the dogs at Southland Gaming and Racing in their new Bourbon Street Steakhouse & Grill. For more information or to make reservations, which are highly recommended, call 870-735-3670. Tell 'em David sent ya'.