

The Restaurant

A quiet masterpiece at the Historic Reserve



By Melissa Wolf & James Walling

Walking into The Restaurant at the Historic Reserve is like stepping back in time. The house, built in 1849, stays true to its roots with period fixtures, rich woodwork, dark leather and flickering candlelight. The main dining room is a warm and cozy space graced by two large fireplaces, a beautiful wall of inlaid wine shelving, and elegant ambiance to spare.

From the word go the service was exceptional. Our waiter, Eric (a self-proclaimed "foodie"), was charming and incredibly knowledgeable, from his taste in wine, to the encyclopedic lecture on hanger steak we overheard him delivering to a nearby table.

At Eric's recommendation, we started with a butter leaf salad with bleu cheese, bacon, avocado and house-made ranch. Neither of us is too fond of ranch, but this dressing was to die for—rich, creamy, and delightfully seasoned.

For our entrees, we put our faith in the chef and ordered both of the evening's specials. James had the "Mixed Grill" special, which consisted of a sliced veal pinwheel stuffed with crab meat and asparagus, and served with Russian scallops in a lemon-caper sauce. Suffice it to say, he was pleased. The blackened salmon with radiatore pasta that I ordered was tasty enough to cement the inevitability of our return. The chardonnay Eric recommended paired perfectly with both of our meals.

After dinner, we migrated to the other side of the house, the Commanders Whiskey and Wine bar. It was at this point in the evening that our experience ceased to be merely delightful and graduated to the class of truly memorable. The bartender, George, is of that rare breed that not only knows how to make a phenomenal drink, but knows how to make people feel—dare we say it?—special. He's quite possibly the most charismatic, gregarious bartender either of us has ever met (and we've met a lot). In fact, his regulars have established a group called The F.O.G. (Friends of George), and are fond of commenting on the bar's "FOGginess" when George is at his best, working the room.

Now, about those phenomenal drinks:

James, a connoisseur of "The Beautiful" (equal parts Grand Marnier and cognac), agreed to try George's "Beyond Beautiful." At \$35 a serving, this baby isn't cheap, but if James is to be trusted (and he does love his cognac), it is well worth the added expense. For me, George recommended an ounce of the Dow's 30-year aged Tawny Port to go with my delicious orange crème brûlée. As good as the dessert was, the Port was even better, and I soon devoted my whole atten-



tion to it, leaving the remaining brûlée to James (not a regular occurrence, believe me). It was the perfect end to a perfect dining experience.

The Restaurant is aptly named. It is impossible to say so without sounding over-the-top, but this place is the best Vancouver has to offer, the one and only, *the* restaurant. Pay them a visit and find out for yourself. Tell George we send our regards! **WV**

The Restaurant at the Historic Reserve (and Commanders Whiskey and Wine Bar) is located in the Grant House at 1101 Officers Row, Vancouver, WA, 98661. Telephone 360.906.1101. For information about the restaurant, upcoming events, or to view menus, visit www.restauranthr.com.