

## DINING REVIEW

# Summer dining: Citrus Grillhouse's prix fixe



Seared Cape Cod Scallops.



Pork &amp; Sausage Bolognese.


 Chef Scott Varricchio.  
 PHOTO BY DEBRA MURPHY

BY TINA RONDEALI  
 Columnist

In what is now a highly competitive annual battle for best summer menu deal, never before has a defending champ retained its crown.

Each year, one of our many fine restaurants seems to step up to the "can-you-top-this" challenge, putting forward a combination of food, wine and prices that beats anything island diners have seen previously.

That seems truer than ever this year, with dishes more creative – and prices lower – than we have ever seen them.

As we near the midway point of our summer sampling, the Citrus Grillhouse seems well positioned to capture the best deal honors for the second year in a row.

If you arrive Monday through Friday before 6:30 pm, you can enjoy a starter, an entrée and the restaurant's seaside setting for \$15. You can also add a dessert to the prix fixe for \$2. And if you care for wine, two of you can share

a bottle of a pinot noir, cabernet or chardonnay for only \$10.

What's new this year – in addition to the bargain wine – is that Executive Chef Scott Varricchio has expanded the prix fixe options, which he describes as a marriage of summertime picnic and classic comfort foods.

In addition to the four starters and ten entrées on the printed menu, Varricchio offers one or two verbal specials nightly depending on what was available in the market that morning.

When we stopped by last Friday, the oceanfront patio was already full (outdoor seating is first come, first served) and we were shown to a nice table for two in the restaurant's elegant, minimalist dining room.

The server quickly brought some bread with a tasty hummus dip to get us started, and we decided to go with a bottle of the chardonnay.

For starters on this evening, my husband picked the cucumber and haricot vert salad and I decided to try one of that evening's verbal specials, a sweet corn veloute with curry oil.

Both the veloute, a creamy sweet soup served slightly below room temperature, and the cucumber salad with crème fraiche and mint dressing were wonderfully refreshing summertime starters.

Then for entrées, I ordered the seared Cape Cod sea scallops and my husband had the bacon wrapped meatloaf.

Don't be thrown off by the Cape Cod origins of these scallops. These are not little bay scallops. These are the big boys – perfectly pan seared, nestled atop a potato puree and finished with bacon jus. For me, this is the to-die-for item on the summer menu.

My husband said the bacon-wrapped meatloaf – beef, veal and pork combined with seasonings, accompanied by mashed potatoes and a luscious truffled mushroom gravy – was the best rendition of this comfort food he has enjoyed in a long time.

As we were enjoying our dinner, we spotted a couple of other prix fixe entrées making their way to nearby tables. When we remarked on them,

we were soon offered samples.

One we found surprisingly good was the fish and chips – Atlantic cod that had been beer battered then dusted with white corn polenta to give it a thin crunchy layer, served with flash-fried kale "chips" and a caper-red onion remoulade. The kale chips are a great variation on what normally comes with this dish.

We also sampled the Creekstone prime flank steak – nice thin slices steak served atop a fantastic creamy parmesan risotto – and the chicken "spiedie" and salt potato, a tasty concoction which we were told was picnic food from the chef's boyhood.

Now for desserts. On the prix fixe, the options are vanilla panna cotta with strawberry coulis; key lime pie; or dark chocolate citrus scented cake with dark chocolate ice cream. But another one of those verbal options on this evening won out over other three: banana bread with housemade banana ice cream. Yum.

A party of two can dine very well on the prix fixe for a total tab not much over \$30 without dessert, and only a few dollars more if you add a sweet. Include an eminently drinkable bottle of wine and you are still only in the mid-\$40s.

While the portions here are not huge, these are all light, perfect sized dishes for summer.

The Citrus Grillhouse summer prix fixe is a dining value that will be very hard to beat.

I welcome your comments, and encourage you to send feedback to me at [tina@verobeach32963.com](mailto:tina@verobeach32963.com).

*The reviewer is a beachside resident who dines anonymously at restaurants at the expense of Vero Beach 32963. ■*

## SUMMER MENU RATINGS

Citrus Grillhouse  
 1050 Easter Lily Lane  
 772-234-4114

### Ratings:

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Summer Hours: Daily, 5 pm to close

Beverages: Full bar

★★★★★ Superb  
 ★★★★★ Noteworthy  
 ★★★ Good  
 ★★ Fair  
 ★ Poor