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Review: At Winston in Mount Kisco, the Play of Sweetness and Spice

By STEVE REDDICLIFFE JUNE 5, 2015

The Moroccan duck breast is delicious: a fan of perfectly cooked rose-colored slices, with a top layer offering an intriguing interplay of sharp and sweet.

A signature dish at Winston in Mount Kisco, it was so good (including the next day, when I had more of it for dinner at home) that it was one of the first things I asked the restaurant's chef, Michael Williams, about when I called him several days later. He was happy to explain.

"I make a tangerine honey and then I toast the spices" — cumin prominent among them — "and I grind that into the honey," he said. All of that is applied to the duck and it is then given the brûlée treatment under a broiler. "Basically it works," Mr. Williams said, warming up to the topic. "The sweet, the spice, and then the brûlée; there's a little bitterness.

"Then the potato gratin," he said, throwing in the side dish. "How can you lose?"

He was being matter of fact, and he delivered the last line with a laugh, but his account had me thinking of placing a takeout order while I had him on the phone.

The duck was not the only standout in Mr. Williams's lineup. There was a moist rectangle of halibut accompanied by purple cauliflower and a lavender slash of creamy purée made with it (a special one night). A meaty rack of lamb with pan-seared Parmesan gnocchi (another special). The Winston chicken, which pulls off the neat trick of seeming both hearty and light; the full-flavored chicken comes with spaetzle and buttery tasting mushrooms, a pitcher of vibrant basil sauce on the side.

For openers, Winston serves first-rate crab cakes with creamy guacamole and a brush stroke of chipotle sauce and, on some nights, terrific pork tacos for which the meat is braised in a mole sauce made with guajillo and chipotle peppers. And by all means get an order of the stellar fries.

I enjoyed all of these on the second-floor loft of a striking space designed by Grandberg & Associates Architects, whose offices are across the street.

The first floor features huge windows, tables along a banquette, an inviting zinc-topped bar and a stunning, illuminated, glass-walled wine room at the back. Its golden glow, the color of chardonnay, almost immediately puts a person in a wine-ordering mood. This is a wise course of action — Paul Neagu, the restaurant's general manager and sommelier, makes smart recommendations. He is a friendly host at a place where every staff member is ready with a greeting.

The second floor is a dining area where one wall showcases photographs of various Mount Kisco locales like the Merestead mansion and Leonard Park; an alcove at the back is big on framed George Booth cartoons featuring funny dogs. (More on that later.) The flatware on this level consists of antique pieces from Mr. Williams's collection.

Up on the roof is an open-air bar, a smattering of couches and a handful of tables at which, if the Sunday weather is nice, you can order from an excellent brunch menu. The meal is largely the province of the sous chef, Jan Michael Anastasio, who turns out remarkably good, chive-dotted biscuits with sausage gravy; challah French toast with notes of orange and maple; and a sandwich he created called the Great One, which it really is — fried egg, country ham, pork belly confit and Cheddar on a peppery biscuit, with a beaker full of a righteous red-eye gravy.

Not every dish here was successful. On a midweek night when service lagged (it was polished and pleasant on other visits), the halibut in a special with a lobster and mushroom risotto was overcooked and underseasoned, and nothing really pulled the components together. The sourdough rolls that started this meal were dry, but the restaurant's spread, made with ricotta, roasted garlic and olive oil, was always welcome. Salads seemed dutiful, and the bowls in which some were served were so deep that dressings tended to pool at the bottom of them.

A cookie plate (brownies and biscotti in the mix) did not make much of an impression. But a fruit tart with vanilla cream was fine, and a trio of crèmes brûlées even better (chocolate and vanilla are in the regular rotation; a green tea version guest-starred on a recent evening).

But back to the dogs.

The restaurant got its name from Mr. Williams's American pit bull terrier after a challenging brainstorming session.

"I'm not sure if you're aware of how difficult it is to come up with a name for an establishment these days," Mr. Williams said. "Everything's taken!"

But the name Winston worked because he is "loved by pretty much everybody that meets him."

"He's a great dog — and he's handsome," Mr. Williams said.

Large photographs of Winston are prominently displayed near the front entrance of the restaurant.

He really is cute.

Winston

130 East Main Street
Mount Kisco
914-244-9780
winstonrestaurant.com

Very Good

THE SPACE A touch of TriBeCa with a rooftop bonus. Wheelchair accessible. Very enjoyable music playlists featuring songs by Aloe Blacc, Asa, and, at brunch, Naughty Boy with Sam Smith.

THE CROWD Nicely turned out couples and groups. Friendly and efficient service on two visits, tentative service on a third.

THE BAR Wide-ranging, appealing wine list. We liked a Chateau Lafont Menaut Blanc from 2012 (\$58) and an Aia Vecchia cabernet sauvignon from 2011 (\$88). Bottles are 25 percent off Tuesdays to Thursdays. A glass of 2013 Esprit de Sarrail rosé is \$10. Draft beers from a thoughtfully assembled roster are \$8. Cocktails are \$16 (brunch selections are \$12).

THE BILL Appetizers, \$10 to \$16; entrees, \$19 to \$36; desserts, \$8 to \$15. Brunch entrees, \$9 to \$15. Coffee drink advisory: Lattes are \$8, cappuccinos, \$7.75; both are served in cups that venture into venti territory.

WHAT WE LIKED Crab cake, pork tacos, Moroccan duck breast, Winston chicken, halibut with purple cauliflower (special), rack of lamb (special), biscuits and gravy, French toast, French fries, the Great One sandwich.

IF YOU GO Tuesdays to Thursdays, 5 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 5 to 11 p.m. Sundays, 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday brunch, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Reservations recommended. Parking on the street and in lot behind restaurant.

RATINGS Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor.

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