

Carol & Joe Davis

FINE DINING DETECTIVES

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EPICUREAN EPISODES

There is always a place for a new Steak and Seafood Restaurant in town. It seems that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Steak was in...then steak was out...now steak is back in again...or did it ever go away? We've always enjoyed a good steak and now Restaurateurs Edward Pizzuti and Carlos Valdes once again fill a need with Brando's Steak & Seafood. Brando's is unique because they have their own wine shop. Vino Wine Shop was moved into the restaurant, providing great ambiance and value for their clientele. Wine Racks and a Cold Case make it possible to buy both Red and chilled White Wine to accompany your dinner or to take home. This is a great value for diners because you avoid the higher mark-up usually associated with wine in a restaurant. The décor is vivid with stylish black bistro chairs at the bar and at the cocktail tables. There is plenty of space between dining tables, allowing each party to have some privacy in this comfortable atmosphere. The walls are covered with large

pictures of movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando.

We were seated at our table and Venona our waitress arrived shortly to explain how we could select our wine from their Vino Wine Shop and to tell us about the Specials of the Day. Light Jazz vocals provided pleasant background music and we happily perused the menu before going over to choose our wine. It was fun "shopping" for our wine and we could see that other diners were enjoying it also. We decided on a Cabernet to pair with our beef entrees.

The Appetizers were all interesting, so we asked our waitress what she recommended and took her advice. The big favorite was the Oysters Rockefeller, which were a true taste sensation! The oysters were centered on the shell in a light hollandaise sauce and broiled until they were golden brown with spinach, grated parmesan cheese and freshly chopped parsley. This was a fantastic beginning to our meal. The Fresh Cracked Dungeness Crab was excellent as well and we all concurred that it was the way fresh crab

should be eaten. The fresh seafood just kept on coming, with Oysters on the Half Shell -- perfectly cleaned and super fresh -- and the Bloody Mary Shrimp Cocktail, which had wonderful large prawns. All the shellfish received very high marks!

The Entrees all include soup or house salad. We normally won't mention a House Salad unless it is unique. Here, the mixed young lettuces with balsamic vinaigrette dressing were topped with Mandarin oranges, toy box tomatoes and raisins. It gave us a great idea for spicing up our salads at home. The Soups were another option, so we tried both that were available. The Minestrone was perfectly seasoned and had lots of cabbage, as we like it. The New England Clam Chowder had great texture, was tangy, and was not too thick or too brothy.

The Entrees were all generous portions. We particularly enjoyed the Calamari Steak Dore with lemon caper sauce. It was tender and had a wonderful light sauce. The Chicken Paillard was a pounded chicken breast, marinated in garlic, olive



oil, and herbs, char-grilled and topped with a tomato-cucumber salsa. It was a very fresh, healthy choice with great flavor. Steak fans will be pleased with either of the ones we had, since all the steaks are Certified Choice Black Aged Angus Beef. The Filet Mignon was very tender and tasty and came rare as ordered with a choice of mushroom sauce or Gorgonzola butter. We also had Brando's Choice, which was Surf & Turf that included a 16 oz. New York Sirloin topped with Gorgonzola butter and 6 delicious Jumbo Garlic Prawns.

The Desserts are made fresh daily by Pastry Chef Sheri. We were impressed with all four that we tasted. The Crème Brulee was perfectly prepared. It is so popular these days, you may

want to check out Debbie Puente's best selling book, *Elegantly Easy Crème Brulee*, and cremebrulee.com. The Chocolate Pot de Crème -- a rich, satiny smooth egg-based French Custard with a Black Cherry bottom -- was actually our favorite. The Berry Vanilla Cheesecake was surprisingly very light and creamy. The Chocolate Torte with raspberry and vanilla drizzled on it was dense and delightful for true chocolate lovers. The double espresso and coffees helped us enjoy our desserts.

The Wine List is from the Vino Wine Shop and has over 1000 choices. All wines in their retail racks are available to diners at retail prices which are considerably lower than normal restaurant markup even with the modest \$5 corkage. Wines by the glass are also

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available, with a larger-than-usual 7 oz. pour. We browsed and found a 2002 Napa Valley Stags Leap Artemis Cabernet Sauvignon, which was delicious and paired perfectly with our steaks. We ordered white wine by the glass, since a bottle would have been too much. They had a wonderful 2002 Sonoma County Chalk Hill Sauvignon Blanc which was perfect with the Calamari Dore. We stopped back at the Wine shop on the way out and bought a few bottles to bring home.

The true sign of a good restaurant is smiles on the faces of the diners.

All we saw were smiles the night we dined. There were large parties, couples and solo diners who were all enjoying the food, wine, atmosphere and casual yet professional service. You'll be glad you dined on the fresh seafood and tender steaks at Brando's.

Our Dining Assistants enjoyed the generous portions and said they were scrumptious and we agree. We also saw the lunch menu, which was well priced. Brando's is a welcome addition to the local dining scene with its excellent seafood and steaks.

Post Notes:

**Brando's
Steak & Seafood**

1370 Redwood Way
(2 blocks East of Hwy 101)
Petaluma, Ca 94952
707-795-0119
Tues-Thurs
11 AM – 9 PM
Fri-Sat
11 AM – 10 PM
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Children under 10 free on
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Graffiti Could Be Good For The Theater District

Normally, this space is reserved for restaurant reviews. Occasionally, restaurant ideas come along that seem to deserve a PREVIEW. Such is the case with Graffiti, opening late June or early July at 2nd and B Streets in Petaluma.

Graffiti is the brainchild of owners Mark and Maureen McGowan, along with head chef Jeremy Roberts. We hope to bring you our thoughts on their food in August. With entrees like Citrus Marinated Ahi with Wonton Spikes and Wasabi Tobiko, or Black Pepper and Rosemary Seared Beef Tenderloin Carpaccio with Horseradish, Whipped Cream, and Micro Greens, we can hardly wait. They also promise an "exceptional burger" though it's still in planning.

Good Idea #1: Small plates, not new, but unusual in Petaluma. Mark and Jeremy say they're "burned out on the standard, 3-component dinner: vegetables, starch, and meat."

Good Idea #2: "Bites and Tastes", complimentary tastes of special items or items being considering for the menu before you're seated or before you order. They're a great alternative to bread and water.

Good Idea #3: Whole Dollar Pricing. No more "\$19.95 plus tax" entrees. Prices will be in whole dollar amounts, including tax. Mark and Jeremy promise "high-end food at mid-range prices." Throw in expansive river views, outdoor seating for 150, specially designed and lit spaces for displaying 2- and 3-dimensional local art, and late-night kitchen hours for theater-goers – and Graffiti may well be a great addition to the Petaluma Restaurant scene.



Judges Grand Champion for Chili, Santa Rosa Firefighters (photo by Todd Cary)

Chili Cook-Off Best Ever

The Great Petaluma Chili Cook-off, Salsa and Beer Tasting, Cinnabar's largest annual fundraising event, netted over \$35,000 for their award-winning youth program. In fact, great sponsorship, good weather and the growing popularity of the event contributed to the biggest turnout in history. Held on May 1st at Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds, the competition brought in over 1200 attendees, 32 chili/salsa teams, 14 breweries, 5 vendors and numerous roaming performers.

Top prizewinners were as follows:

The Santa Rosa Firefighters won the award for Best Booth. The Best Costume award went to Red Hat Chili. The Petaluma Firefighters were judged to

have the Best Spirit. Judges Awards were presented to Tree Huggin' Hippy Chili for Best Individual Chili, Santa Rosa Firefighters for Best Chili by a Service Organization, Trader Joe's of Petaluma for Best Chili by a Business, Beau Diddley's BBQ for Best Chili by a Restaurant or Caterer, and Benedetta "Fresh" Aromatherapeutics for Best Vegetarian Chili. The Judges' Grand Champion Award went to Santa Rosa Firefighters.

The coveted People's Choice Awards went to Santa Rosa Firefighters for Best Chili, Tree Huggin' Heggies for Best Vegetarian Chili, Kate & Doc's Supper House for Best Salsa, and Lagunitas Brewery for Best Beer.

#1 People's Choice Salsa, Kate & Doc's Supper House (photo by Todd Cary)



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