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WESTCHESTER DINING | MAHOPAC

Meals for All Budgets Under a Lakeside Sky

By M. H. REED

THE stage is always set at the Terrace Club in Mahopac, especially in the evening, when a silvery lake reflects the sunset and its kaleidoscopic afterglow. No wonder such a motley crew of diners — couples, families, gatherings of friends, boaters — flock to this restaurant on lovely Lake Mahopac. They come for a breath of fresh air, a restorative reconnect with nature and some fine food priced to fit all budgets.

The young, exuberant co-owners, Amie Cunningham and Kenneth Breiman, have sought to bring a casual sophistication to their new club, a mix of lace and log cabin, comfortable for customers in cutoff jeans or black sheath.

Heading the kitchen is Mr. Breiman, who spent the last two years as executive chef at Peter X. Kelly's [X2O Xaviars on the Hudson](#) in Yonkers. Included on the menu is his take on a few dishes similar to Mr. Kelly's early successes in Garrison. Coconut shrimp, for one. Is it now passé? Yes. Is it mighty good? Yes, again. These crisped jumbos revealed their pinkness beneath a mere wash of batter. Mr. Breiman also delivered hefty sliders, three for \$9, the meat patties grilled to order and served on freshly made brioche buns toasted with a lick of duck fat.

Little touches — like the swipe of duck fat and the lacing of truffle oil on the popcorn served to every table — brought lots of excitement to what could have been standard fare. There was the crunch of piquant wasabi tobiko on a tuna and salmon parfait bound with crème fraîche; the savory sabayon-based sauce used to cream fresh spinach; the chunky, earthy wild mushrooms in a risotto.

And the salads all had something extra — a Caesar with white anchovy and shavings of Grana Padano; field greens under Coach Farm goat cheese and sweet organic Del Cabo tomatoes; heirloom tomatoes with fennel and watercress. The only disappointments among the starters were one of the specials, a fairly routine gazpacho, and a very crabby Maryland crab cake that could have used a spicier togarishi.

Pastas, available in small or entree-size portions, and main courses were also well served by

thoughtful additions. Slow-roasted tomatoes made all the difference in a rock shrimp sauce for trenne pasta, only a tad too al dente. A coat of puffed sushi rice added a nutty crunch to rare salmon, and a mélange of vegetables carried out an Asian theme.

The Cedar Creek New York strip steak au poivre was ready for a close-up in a steakhouse, the dish completed by skinny fries and that admirable creamed spinach. These accompaniments also went with hanger steak, but here the kitchen staff could have used more direction. Although cooked perfectly to our medium-rare order, on one of two tries the steak arrived sliced with the grain, making the tasty cut unpleasantly chewy.

Thick, snowy Chatham cod (the real McCoy) came pan-seared to flaky perfection, the fish's sweetness countered by a snappy horseradish risotto and the longest Chinese long beans I've ever come across. The scent of coriander was the extra fillip for pink, tender duck breast that sheared away easily from its protective fat, the harmony of flavors completed by fig sauce (a sliced fig atop) and fresh-out-of-the-garden Swiss chard and celery root mash.

Engaging desserts — from a cool root beer float to a decadent sundae with the works — were not to be skipped. The lemon cheesecake was dense and creamy, with a delicious citrus jolt. Baked and served in an individual dish, a beautiful peach raspberry tartlet came loaded with ice cream, which is just about the only thing that wasn't made in-house.

Even if the food were not as good as it is, the Terrace Club's lakeside location would be enough to draw a crowd — as it has since the 1920s, when it was said to have been a tearoom. I've always enjoyed sitting here even when it was the splintery Dockside. Locals will remember it as Cathy's Lakeside and, before that, La Bonne Vie.

The front of the house can be hectic; the delightful Amie Cunningham seemed to be everywhere at once, directing, chatting, even busing a table or two when needed. There's work still to be done at this six-week-old restaurant: The aimless staff needs more training, the reservation policy (only for parties of eight or more) should be reviewed, and, on the deck, the attractive cotton baffles, tied in nautical knots, could be better used to control the harsh light before sundown.

But there's no denying the energetic vibe that the Terrace Club emanates. It would be hard to find better at twice the price.

The Terrace Club

825 South Lake Boulevard (Route 6N)

Mahopac

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theterraceclubrestaurant.com

VERY GOOD

THE SPACE Crystal chandeliers and sheers fancy up the rustic bones of an old lakeside restaurant and bar. High noise level and inadequate ventilation. Big, comfortable dining deck and separate outdoor lounge with bar. Stunning views of Lake Mahopac and, in the far distance, a house designed by [Frank Lloyd Wright](#). Ramp for the handicapped.

THE CROWD Everyone from old boaters to elegant summer vacationers. Disorganized, untrained but earnest and willing servers wearing black T-shirts.

THE BAR Under the apex of a steeply pitched roof, the indoor bar overlooks the dining room. Reasonably priced wine list, with many bottles under \$35; wines by the glass, \$6 to \$9.

THE BILL Lunch entrees, \$12 to \$22. Dinner entrees, \$17 to \$22.

WHAT WE LIKED Sliders, coconut shrimp, tuna and salmon parfait; pan-seared Chatham cod, puffed-sushi-rice-crusting salmon, hanger steak, strip steak au poivre, duck breast; wild mushroom risotto, creamed spinach; root beer float, peach raspberry tartlet, lemon cheese cake.

IF YOU GO Lunch: Tuesday through Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Dinner: Tuesday through Sunday, 5 to 10 p.m. Reservations taken for groups of eight or more. All diners should call first for a place on the waiting list. Adjoining parking lot with valet on weekends.

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