

Salmon Dave's still does it best

When it's time to go fish, stay in familiar, flavorful waters

Many moons ago when I started writing this column, one of the first reviews I did was on a then upstart new

eatery in Rocky River that went by the precocious name of **Salmon Dave's**. Housed at the site once home to numerous grunge bars and just across the road from the landmark Big Pink Hotel, this new kid on the then minimal Northeast Ohio restaurant scene made a name for itself right out of the box for serving some of the best salmon dishes in town.

Dining Out



Jacques DuJour

Fast forward a half-dozen years to the present. The question arises: Can the tried-and-true fish dishes of this now old favorite hold up to the plethora of trendy new eclectic dining spots sprouting like mushrooms about town?

You bet! Although fish is still the mainstay of the menu, chef Matt Gambatese has made some subtle changes to mix things up a bit and keep things deliciously interesting. Specialty menus featuring various culinary themes pop up on a regular basis. Last spring it was a Mardi Gras-Cajun thing. Over the summer things took on a Caribbean flavor, and in a few short weeks the annual lobster fest will return.

So, since things at Salmon Dave's are the same but different, I've been urged by foodie friends to do a re-review. I am pleased to report that things are as thumbs up as they ever were.

To begin with, the decor remains pretty much the same as on the day the place opened. Capturing the feel of a Pacific Northwest Tavern, this place has large, whimsical prints from a bygone era. Stuffed heads of various beasts create a rustic lodge appeal without going overboard. Dark wood, comfortable tapestry-padded booths and brass lamp-lights add the finishing touches to delightful surroundings. About the only new addition is the lobster tank that greets guests in the lobby. Peer inside, and you'll find mud bugs of assorted sizes — from puny one-pounders right on up to the big guys with claws the size of hammers. At \$19.95 a pound that's something to ponder.

SALMON DAVE'S

19015 Old Lake Road, Rocky River
Call 330-928-6600

Open every day for lunch and dinner.

Wheelchair accessible.

Prices high moderate.
Range for two, all inclusive, \$50 on up.

(OVERALL): **YYYY**
ATMOSPHERE: **YYYY**
SERVICE: **YYYY**
FOOD: **YYYY**
VALUE: **YYYY**

Ratings are as follows: Four Y's — YIPPEE!
three Y's — YES!, two Y's — Yeh!,
one Y — Yawn!, no Y — YUCK!

Arcade's Guide to Outdoor Dining

JACKALOPE BAR AND ROTISSERIE
301 LAKESIDE AVE., LORAIN
440-288-2051

CHEZ FRANCOIS
555 MAIN ST., VERMILION
440-967-0603

AROUND THE CORNER SALOON
18616 DETROIT AVE., LAKEWOOD
216-521-4413

GILLESPIE'S SNICKER'S
1261 W. 76TH ST., CLEVELAND
216-631-7555

SHOOTER'S
1148 MAIN AVE., CLEVELAND
216-961-6900

THAT PLACE ON BELLFLOWER
11410 BELLFLOWER, CLEVELAND
216-397-8380

GREAT LAKES BREWING CO.
2516 MARKET ST., CLEVELAND
216-771-4404

WALLABY'S
30005 CLEMENS RD., WESTLAKE
44-808-1700

ROCKY RIVER BREWING CO.
21290 CENTER RIDGE RD., ROCKY RIVER
440-808-1700

Jeso
10427 CLIFTON BLVD., CLEVELAND
440-774-3741

THE WOODS
21919 CENTER RIDGE RD., CLEVELAND
440-333-WOOD

CLEVELAND CHOP HOUSE AND BREWERY
824 W. ST. CLAIR, CLEVELAND
216-623-0909

On the appetizer side, old favorites such as raspberry barbecue shrimp and baked brie have been joined with more contemporary offerings such as a delectable lobster and crab sushi roll, rare, paper thin slices of tenderloin carpachio enhanced by a drizzle of truffle oil and a sprinkling of parmigiano-reggiano cheese and Ahi sashimi, which translates to hand trimmed grade-A Yellowfin tuna seared rare, thinly sliced and accompanied the traditional fiery wasabi, soy sauce and pickled ginger. Pick any of the above and you can't go wrong.

Salads are extra, but there's no denying a puck of tangy goat cheese breaded and deep fried till just oozy that's joined with a mix of fresh seasonal greens, crisp prosciutto, crunchy foccacia croutons and a zippy basil vinaigrette.

Kudos again for the "upside down" portobella mushroom melange, which features a big

meaty grilled cap topped with mesclun mix toasted pecans provolone and balsamic vinaigrette.

Those who prefer soup to salad won't be disappointed by the velvety lobster bisque chocked full of sweet lobster meat in a rich cream stock. "Heaven in a bowl!" professed my thoughtful dinner companion.

Catching the tail end of the Caribbean phase, one companion opted for the Ja'makin Me Crazy short-ribs braised until fall of the bone tender and glazed with a wonderful pineapple honey barbecue sauce. Go-alongs of spicy slaw and Macadamia-nut rice weren't so shabby, either.

Sautéed Carolina grouper sheathed in a smoked salmon crust and complimented by a yummy asparagus cream sauce was another instant hit, as was the pan roasted tilapia paired with rock shrimp and mussels in a spicy tomato based tasso ham broth.

Standing the test of time however is the salmon. Top-of-the-line certified-quality Bay of Fundy filets are flown in daily and can be had blackened or chargrilled.

But in this case, simple is best, and the baked version deservedly earns the distinction of being the best in town, hands down.

For dessert, if there's still room, opt for the creamy creme brulee. One companion said it best: "The perfect finish for a perfect dinner."

Service is on par with the quality of the food: Young, informed and professional in every way.

Spirits of all nature are offered as well as a nice variety of wines by the bottle and glass. To help, suggested wines are paired with entrees to make decisions less complicated.

With even more competition for dining dollars on the horizon, Salmon Dave's proves once again that you can keep improving on a good thing to stay ahead of the pack.