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MIAMI-DADE REVIEW Tudor House: Stellar food in a sleek South Beach setting



Tudor House's ricotta gnudi with beets, English peas, and petit basil. Carl Juste / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BY VICTORIA PESCE ELLIOTT VPEVPE@GMAIL.COM Restaurateur Geoffrey Zakarian, who debuted here with Blue Door at the Delano 15 years ago and has won New York City fans with his recent Lambs Club, has created a sophisticated foodie mecca worth experiencing at Tudor House in The Dream Hotel.

Set in a refurbished Art Deco gem, Zakarian's new addition to the Miami dining scene is gorgeous and low-key, with recessed lighting, cushy leather banquettes, marble tables, vintage terrazzo floors and black and white photos of the hotel's glory days. Lush potted plants bring the tropical garden feel inside.

Executive Chef Jamie DeRosa does an excellent job of executing Zakarian's vision with a menu of so many things I like to eat that it was tough to order. It's a grown-up sampler of American (fried chicken, burgers, meatballs) and Mediterranean (branzino, charcuterie, Provençal-style langoustines) specialties with trendy but judicious riffs like deconstructed soups, a few puffs of foam and lots of mason jars and wooden cutting boards.

Meals begin with a spiffy amuse bouche—a crunchy bruschetta with buratta in one case, topped by a slippery peeled grape tomato and a basil leaf so small it must have been placed with a tweezer.

IF YOU GO

Place: Tudor House. Address: 1111 Collins Ave., Miami Beach Rating: ★ ★ ★ 1/2 (Excellent) Contact: 305-534-8455, www.tudorhousemiami.com Hours: 7 a.m.-10 p.m. daily; later on weekends Prices: Appetizers \$9-\$15, entrees \$15-\$29, sides \$8, dessert \$9. FYI: Limited metered parking; valet \$20. Full bar; corkage \$35 for wines not on their list. AX, DS, MC, VS.

Addictively hot, salty nuggets of pretzel bread also land on the table within minutes, served with a pucker-inducing red wine mustard.

One perfectly fluffy meatball in a silky tomato sauce and a dusting of snowy Parmesan cheese could be a meal by itself sopped up with the crusty bread. So, too, voluptuous gnudi in a silken sauce dotted with tiny baby vegetables like shimmering jewels.

Other exquisite dishes included a pea soup the color of an Irish field in spring with a flavor so fresh and vibrant it felt alive. That sense was heightened by the puffs of lime foam "marshmallows" that lined the bottom of the pretty white bowl.

A picture-perfect mason jar of steak tartare with raw egg, a dollop of crème fraiche and musky chanterelles is aggressively seasoned and ground to just the right meaty but not muddy consistency.

Though a bit thick, DeRosa's Cuban sandwich is perhaps the best I have ever had, made with rich pork belly on slightly sweet egg bread plus sour silvers of pickle and a pot of perfect mustard.

Branzino is done expertly here as two golden-seared filets over wilted heirloom spinach, fava beans, baby fennel and Cerignola olives. Grouper cheeks were gently floured, grilled and served with a rainbow of herb-roasted cauliflower in a vibrant romesco sauce.

A dish of tiny, eraser-size clams also approached greatness with their clean, briny flavor, but the buttery lemon sauce was so very salty.

For all the hearty mains, there are as many excellent snacks to sustain a night of drinking, including a standout poached tuna served in a jar with pickled vegetables.

The missteps were minor: A basil-infused watermelon cocktail that tasted medicinal and fried chicken with a mealy texture. I have heard others rave about the chicken, but ours must have been soaked too long in its buttermilk bath.

The wine list is a thoughtful compilation of familiar labels and some unusual gems that work well with the food, but once bottles get over the \$50 mark, I'd sure like to see some vintages.

The wait staff is more of the pretty than prim school, dressed in dark starched Levis, black shirts with permanent smiles and enough tattoos to make me wonder if they were required as part of the uniform.

Desserts by the talented Natalia Arevalo (Nobu) veer from precious to perfect—vanilla lollipops, rocky road ice cream in yet another mason jar and a deconstructed strawberry shortcake with a cool and tangy strawberry soup poured over it. And anyone who can come up with a brown-butter milkshake is a star in my book.

There is room for stars here, and plenty of them.

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I stop here quite often to have what I call "thank god for a good glass of wine in South Beach" - and have tried the chilled octopus. I am a huge fan of octopus (my mom makes the best octopus with pimenton in the word) so I wanted to give it a try at the Tudor House and I have to say, I give the dish a rounded 10 (keep in mind that cooking octopus is a hit or miss art), but at the Tudor House they got it. The service is exceptional (let's cross our fingers this will not go down as so many other places in SOBE), and last but not least - what an amazing job they have done with remodeling this Art Deco property! I am an Art Deco aficionado and it is lovely to see the care that they have put into this building.

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