

DINING

RESTAURANT REVIEW

You'll never want to leave South Beach Grill

By Diane Sinkinson
Star-News Correspondent

On a recent trip to Wrightsville Beach, we found Culinary Paradise. We enjoyed a heavenly meal in an intimate spot overlooking the yacht basin on Lumina Avenue.

Walking across a patio with now-vacant umbrella tables, we entered South Beach Grill, where a tiny vestibule doubles as a bar. Its three seats were occupied, and football players butted silently on the TV. The glass-walled dining room had only 12 tables, and all were happily occupied. We had called for reservations and were glad we'd done so, because a line formed behind us, spilling out the door.

After a 15-minute wait, during which we were offered beverages, we were seated. Deciding what to order was a challenge. So many things sounded good.

Our server was extremely enthusiastic. She brought our glasses of Nouvelle Beaujolais and assisted us with our ordering dilemma. The Autumn Duck and Apricot Spring Roll appetizer was seared breast with apricot, cabbage and julienne vegetables with an orange sauce and cranberry relish. It arrived with a sprinkling

SOUTH BEACH GRILL

★★★★ - exceptional
100 S. Lumina Ave.,
Wrightsville Beach
256-4646

SERVICE: Very good, attentive.

PRICE RANGE: \$11-\$20.

HOURS: 11 a.m.-4 p.m., 5-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and Sunday. 11 a.m.-4 p.m., 5-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Reviewers visit restaurants unannounced, order from the menu and pay unidentified. Reviews are not related to whether the restaurant advertises in the Star-News.

Rating system: no stars-poor; ★-good; ★★-very good; ★★★-excellent; ★★★★-exceptional. Reviews are based on food, ambience and service, with price taken into consideration.

of rice noodles. The duck was more done than I like, but the flavors blended well, mixing the earthy duck with sweet, tart and crisp. The Seafood Napoleon was a dramatic presentation of juicy fried tomatoes layered with crab, shrimp, Boursin cheese and beurre blanc. It was simply won-

derful. The garlicky cheese was a delightful foil for the fresh seafood, and the tomatoes provided a nice contrast in texture. The Herb Crusted Sea Scallops were very lightly breaded and toasted brown. The nutty, sweet flavor was complemented by roasted garlic aioli.

Our next course was just as delicious. The House Salad with raspberry vinaigrette tasted clean and fresh. The Caesar was coated with classic dressing and topped with freshly shaved Parmesan cheese.

Our favorite salad was the Spinach, with mushrooms, feta, toasted pecans, tomatoes and warm bacon vinaigrette. Every ingredient was at its peak and combined to provide a truly pleasurable flavor combination. The friend who had ordered the dish shared a bit, then bent possessively over his plate. A survey of the room revealed others in similar posture.

No wonder our server exuded positive energy. She provided the source of delight to so many. The Grouper Linda was a nice piece of pecan-crust fish with crabmeat. The spring onion beurre blanc was a silken thread that weaved the tastes together.

The Sampler contained a small

portion of the Grouper, a beef filet and a crab cake. The beef, hearty and tender, anchored the combination. The crab cake was crispy on the outside and tender and rich within.

Our third entrée, the Scallops Lumina, came in a soup bowl. Scallops, artichoke hearts and mushrooms were baked with dill sherry cream sauce and melted Romano cheese. It was delicious.

We should have stopped, but we felt we must report on dessert. The Key Lime Pie was tart and creamy and rested on a crumbly graham cracker crust.

The Grand Marnier crème brulee was unpretentious and served in a soup cup. Our spoons broke through the candied caramelization on top to sink to cloud light custard beneath.

The chocolate mousse three-layer cake was a bit dry, but the thick layer of what seemed more like ganache than mousse had a strong chocolate punch.

South Beach Grill deserves praise for putting out such a quality menu for affordable prices. Down-to-earth and delicious, this is a restaurant we'll surely revisit.

Diane Sinkinson is a restaurant critic for the Star-News.