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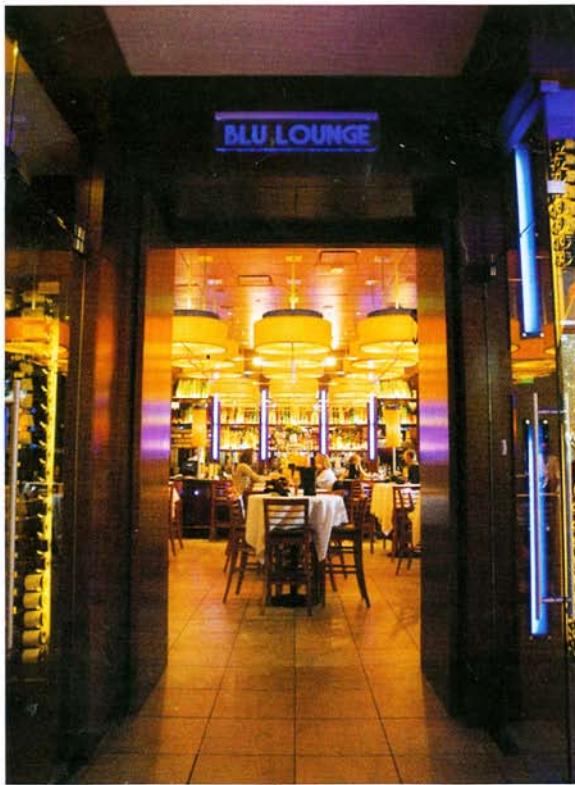
WAVE GRAVE: OCEAN PRIME'S A HIT

& ALL THE BEST BASHES

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JAN/FEB 2010 \$5.95



Prime and Proper

Bring on the stilettos and stogies—Uptown's new surf and turf supper club is red-carpet ready

| By Doty Griffiths | Photography by Carissa Byers |

Can there possibly be room for yet another steakhouse in Dallas, especially within a two-mile range of Uptown? Established top brands include Al Biernat's, Bob's, Dakota's, Nick & Sam's, as well as The Place at Perry's. New on the scene is Dallas Chop House. And those are the indies. Also in the neighborhood are standard bearers for national chains, Charlie Palmer, The Capital Grille, Craft, Morton's and The Palm.

No doubt restaurant industry whiz kid Cameron Mitchell took the competition into account when he committed a copy of his Ocean Prime franchise to the new Rosewood Court luxury office building across from the Rosewood Crescent Hotel. And forged ahead anyway. What sets Ocean Prime apart? A retro "Modern American Supper Club" atmosphere, as opposed to the traditional steak palace or urban beef bistro.

Red carpet on the walkway guiding guests to the front door drops the not-too-subtle hint that this is a glitzy place. So does the entrance leading to a flowing water wall and 900-bottle wine tower. The words

"sensory overload" come to mind. And that's before you experience the cocktail lounge and piano bar framed with luminescent blue light.

Ocean Prime entered the Dallas market with a big footprint: 10,000 square feet with seating for 400 guests in spaces ranging from a glittering, sheltered terrace with outdoor fireplaces, to four dining rooms, private dining areas and a cocktail lounge.

Walking in, there were so many compartments spread over a broad area that it felt as if I'd booked dinner on a cruise ship. P.O.S.H. (from the English luxury liner days when "port out starboard home" meant very fancy) indeed describes the appointments. Warm tan finishes and rich woods, sandstone, sheer draperies, and chocolate brown banquettes establish the supper club theme. Porthole windows and snare drum light fixtures lend what we suppose is the requisite nautical feel. Without a doubt, all the bells and whistles give Ocean Prime a personality about as subtle as the State Fair Midway.

Frankly, my encounter made me think, despite the

Ocean Prime

RATING: ★★

2101 Cedar Springs Rd.

214.965.0440

Dallas.ocean-prime.com

What the stars mean:

★ = fair, some noteworthy qualities;

★★ = good, above average;

★★★ = very good, well above norm;

★★★★ = excellent, among the area's best;

★★★★★ = world-class, extraordinary

in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple

visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall

reaction to food, ambience and service.

HOURS Lunch, Mon.-Fri. 11:30AM to 4PM. Dinner, Mon.-Thurs. 4PM to 10PM; Fri.-Sat. 4PM to 11PM; Sun. 4PM to 9PM.

MOOD SETTERS Wrap long, slim fingers around a hand-crafted cocktail such as the blood orange Negroni, cucumber or tequila gimlet.

FIREPLACE TIME Zip up your thigh-high boots, drag out the fur and enjoy an intimate moment on the patio in front of one of the glowing, inviting fireplaces. This is the only time of year when hot chocolate with a shot of peppermint schnapps is socially acceptable. Feels like Aspen.

NOON NEWS Lunchtime looks like a set for the new Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps, set for release this spring. Is that Gordon Gekko at the bar? Bud Fox hanging on his every word nearby?

WHAT IT COSTS Starters and appetizers \$8 to \$16; entrées \$23 to \$43; sides \$8 to \$11; desserts, \$7 to \$10.

READY FOR PRIME TIME Clockwise from top left: Ocean Prime's lounge and waiting area recall a stylish luxury cruise ship; appetizer of scallops and braised short ribs; Kansas City strip steak.



pedigree and a huge menu (eight potato options alone) devoted to prime meat, seafood and cocktails, that Ocean Prime may be more experiential than gustatory. Or maybe this was an off night in the early opening period when not all the stars were yet aligned in the Ocean Prime universe.

As the name implies, there are more than the usual number of seafood options, particularly as entrées and as “chef’s compositions.” The latter are more composed with a protein, side and garnish, such as the Salt n Pepper Tuna, with wild mushrooms and green peppercorn sauce. Other entrées are à la carte: Pick a fish or steak, add sauce, flavored butter or topping if you like, and sides as desired.

The Ocean Prime formula has worked in Detroit, Miami, Orlando, Phoenix and Tampa. The new Dallas location is one of 17 restaurants under seven different concepts created by Columbus, Ohio-based Mitchell, president and founder of Cameron Mitchell Restaurants, and current chairman of the board of trustees of the Culinary Institute of America. He’s a CIA graduate who proves that the culinary school turns out business as well as food and wine experts.

Service was positively gushing and enthusiastic. Several dishes were outstanding. Ocean Prime’s signature appetizer, giant sautéed shrimp served with a piquant and ingratiating Tabasco cream sauce, is a dish for the ages.

☞ Tongue-in-cheek “Surf n Turf,” an appetizer of pearly, tender diver scallops with rich, mahogany shards of braised short rib was an improbable but wonderful winner as well. The sweet seafood tones of the scallops blended like satin with the rich, meaty notes of the beef.

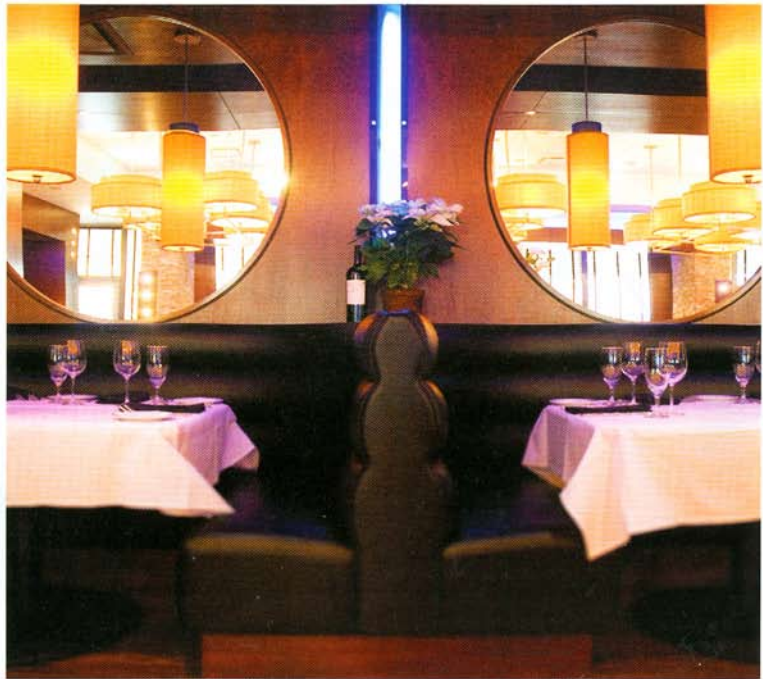
Rhode Island oysters on the half shell (with “smoke” from a presentation with dry ice) were fresh, plump and delightfully briny. Had we stopped there, we would have dubbed Ocean Prime an unqualified success.

But several glitches, including underwhelming entrées and a signature dessert, Baked Alaska, too frozen in the middle to pierce with a fork, took some of the shine off early visits to Ocean Prime. (Our waitress brought us another Baked Alaska that we could enjoy.)

After our trapeze past the soaring wine tower, we thought help from a sommelier might be in order. Imagine our surprise to find that level of wine service isn’t part of the Ocean Prime experience. Several managers were available to offer wine expertise, according to our waitress. Absence of a wine program manager seems strange for such a highly aspirational restaurant. And the wine recommended turned out not to be available. We all hate it when that happens.

A luscious Australian lobster tail happily didn’t need a boost from the optional black truffle butter that tasted more salty than truffy and felt gritty between our teeth. That is one of seven sauces, butters and toppings available for an additional tariff with fish and steak offerings. Jumbo lump crabmeat and Béarnaise sauce for steak “Oscar style” proved considerably better. But the bone-in, dry-aged 16-ounce Kansas City strip wasn’t nearly as succulent, tender and juicy as we dreamed it would be.

Though assertive in flavor, meaty and highly



seasoned wild mushrooms and green peppercorn sauce couldn’t salvage the aforementioned Salt n Pepper Tuna. The giant wedge of seared rare tuna was dull in taste and flabby in texture.

The range of sides covers the full spectrum of steakhouses and Catskill supper clubs. Among the eight potato variations: whipped or garlic mashed; fries with sea salt and vinegar; latkes with applesauce and sour cream; baked; candied yams; twice-baked with cheddar cheese and bacon; and jalapeño au gratin.

Choose from other “supper club sides” such as creamed spinach, caramelized Brussels sprouts, corn, steamed broccoli, onion straws, crab-fried rice and black truffle macaroni and cheese. Portions are ample for sharing.

Even though the first-try, rock-hard Baked Alaska was an unpleasant surprise, we soldiered on with dessert. And we were rewarded with the chocolate peanut butter pie—fluffy peanut butter mousse encased by bittersweet ganache. Peanut butter and chocolate in most guises make perfect partners and in this instance soothed us considerably.

Ocean Prime meets and exceeds all expectation in one major category: the outside terrace with a bar and space for outdoor dining. Sheltered and heated by three outdoor fireplaces, the destination lounge is about as glamorous as al fresco seating gets. Sexy and cozy enough for cocktails or after dinner drinks yet energetic enough for dining, the terrace is Ocean Prime’s crowning glory. It is the ultimate atmosphere for the supper club cum steak and seafood house’s totally now “retro” concept.

Looking out over the downtown skyline from an urban sidewalk atmosphere, the terrace is Dallas’ newest scene. So go ahead, get primed. ■



SHIP SHAPE! From top: Ocean Prime’s nautical theme is carried throughout the restaurant; peanut butter pie has quickly become a crowd pleaser.

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