

Metro Lafayette a Welcome Addition

By Lee Borrowman

One of my favorite summer pleasures is dining al fresco. Lafayette, rapidly becoming Lamorinda's own "gourmet ghetto," is now home to the new Metro Lafayette; another perfect spot at which to indulge in culinary delights on a balmy summer evening. Owner Jack Moore and Chef Mark Lusardi both come with impressive credentials, and their experience is evident in every aspect of their newest venture.

The location at 3524 Mt. Diablo Blvd. has housed other restaurants in the past, and boasts a wonderful patio. What was I thinking bringing three children with me on my first visit to this potential summer home away from home? Well, to be totally honest, it was, "If I bring them all, I can taste more things!" And besides, if I'm going to write about it I should find out if it's kid-friendly; after all, families do occasionally need to eat at restaurants that don't have Play Places. We went early, shortly after 5:00 on a Friday night.

The interior, designed by Sheahan + Quandt of Berkeley, is simple and beautiful. It is far too elegant for me to be comfortable with the kids; another reason to head towards the patio. Casting a somewhat wistful glance at the well-stocked bars, both beverage and raw, I herded my entourage outside to a table that was as out of the way as possible. The sturdy wooden table was large enough to accommodate all of us with our place settings, beverages and shared appetizers and not risk glasses careening over the edge, and tables are set far enough apart so that each group has a modicum of privacy and you don't have to squeeze between other diners just to reach your chair. Large umbrellas and heaters provide additional comfort when needed. At 5:30, there was one other family dining nearby but most of the guests were of the adult variety and the venue filled up as the evening wore on.

Our server, Whitney, did not flinch at the sight of a lone mom clearly outnumbered by the shorter set. She was friendly, knowledgeable and efficient, laughed at our jokes, and gave us just the right amount of attention. Much to our delight, Moore came over and chatted with us briefly, acknowledging his own status as a local parent of school-aged children and offering my kids and their friend a lesson on the appropriate use of a butter knife. Service was attentive and non-intrusive.

It would not be fair or professional for anyone to review a restaurant after only one visit, but I can't resist a few words about the food. We began our meal with a sublime oyster sampler from the raw bar, which was beautifully iced and presented, a Caesar salad and a pair of Peekytoe crab cakes; the crab cakes in particular had a lovely fresh flavor and texture. Moving on to the entrees, the Misoyaki Black Cod with scallion rice cake, tempura mushrooms and living cress with ponzu, one of Lusardi's signature dishes, was very well executed. The black cod had the anticipated sweet crust on the outside and melted in the mouth. The kids devoured a Niman Ranch burger, Croque Monsieur and Niman Ranch dry-aged New York steak without complaint. I was allowed tastes of the steak and the smoky, salty open-faced sandwich and found both satisfactory; the burger disappeared from its plate before I could



Happy al fresco diners

even reach for it. All three were served with a generous portion of crisp, nicely cut skin-on French fries. Although not on the menu, plain pasta is also available for the youngest crowd.

If you're unsure which wine to select from the interesting list, don't hesitate to ask. Moore, a master sommelier candidate, is happy to make a recommendation. The Sylvaner he sent over paired exquisitely with the black cod, and he paid us a return visit to make sure all was well. Finally, when you go, don't skip dessert. A Meyer lemon cheesecake with to-die-for lemon curd, a not-too-sweet peach-apricot-almond crisp with vanilla gelato and a cornmeal cake with fresh berries all graced our table and the subsequent sighs of delight postponed the inevitable ice cube fight until we were nearly ready to depart.

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