

# Restaurant News

## Table Hopping with Rosie

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On our anniversary, we wanted to dine someplace special. Of course, I had a few requirements. It had to be in New Jersey. It had to be someplace that had an exemplary reputation and an added plus would be if it was on the New Jersey Monthly list of the Best Restaurants of 2014. It also had to be someplace we had not been in a long time. Voila! The Pluckemin Inn. The sous chef, Andrew Lattanzio replaced Jose Cuevas three years ago and to our embarrassment, we had never experienced his food.

Want to be pampered? Go here. From the greeting upon arrival to the “goodbye and thank you for coming,” we were dazzled. The ambiance is relaxing, tables are set far enough apart to allow for conversation and the staff is exceptionally well trained and knowledgeable. The napkins had buttonholes, most probably for men to use to keep them selves splatter free; a never seen before detail and we are unsure how often the napkin would be used this way. The restaurant is not stuffy or pretentious, and we saw men in everything from a suit and tie to dungarees and a golf shirt.

It was hard not to fill up on the crusty bread from Balthazar. We opted for the rye, walnut and raisin, and multigrain with sweet butter—it set the mood for our dinner. An amuse of an orange and grapefruit segments spiced with herbs and a vinegar dressing cleansed the palate. One starter was a well-balanced tender and meaty charred Spanish octopus with creamy corona beans, soppressata, arugula, and a bagna cauda broth. Wafts of smoke greeted us when the grilled cauliflower steak was placed on the table. This item is available in a small or entrée portion, and if you love creative uses of vegetables as much as we do, be sure to try, it if available. Served with a farro and quinoa mixture that also contained pistachios, hazelnuts, pine nuts, walnuts, Marcona almonds and peanuts, as well as a lady apple, shaved, vibrant green Brussels sprouts, and vadouvan (an Indian curry blend of spices), this dish was a knockout. The al dente homemade spaghetti alla chitarra was floating in a sauce of cherry tomatoes, finely diced Mangalitsa pancetta, and Oldwick Shepherd cheese that was so flavorful, I finished the sauce with a soup spoon. As with many of the dishes we tasted, it was sparkling with finely diced herbs.

Ethereal ricotta gnocchi were accompanied with fava beans, morels, asparagus, wild ramps, and fontina cream. The crispy skate, one of our favorite fishes, was sublime, excellently prepared, and beautifully fanned out on the plate along with potato and leek puree, mousseron mushrooms, English peas, fava beans, capers, and wild ramps. While executive chef Andrew Lattanzio excelled at blending flavors and textures in the dishes we had, I was disappointed in the sous vide salmon. Although it was moist with a vibrant color, it may have needed a quick sear after cooking to give it some crunch or perhaps should have been cooked in a higher temperature bath for a more refined texture. With that being said, Lowell thought it was terrific and almost licked his plate clean.

Desserts deserve applause also. A blueberry crumble was whimsically paired with caramel corn and toasted almond ice cream; a fruit, corn and nut dessert. An individual strawberry rhubarb pie with a crumb top, was accompanied by candied orange and buttermilk ice cream. The check came with a plate of various cookies. We had eaten past fullness and were very content.

There are 42,000 bottles of wine in inventory and the wine list is so massive, 5,600 selections, that there are two hefty books; one for the white and one for the red. Here is a hint. There are many wines available in all price points, but since it would take you hours to comb through the wine list, check it out online before you go to the restaurant to get an idea of what you would like. There is also a Pluckemin 100 wine list that features affordably priced bottles. Another option is to have the four-course tasting dinner (\$85), which can be paired with wines for an additional \$25; a great deal. Also, be sure to check out the “tower,” a three-story enclosed, temperature-controlled wine room, which is the centerpiece of the restaurant and holds 10,000 bottles.

The Pluckemin Inn is open for lunch from 11:30 AM to 2 PM, Monday through Friday, and for dinner, Monday through Saturday 5:30 to 9 PM. The Tavern is open Monday through S