

*Carol & Joe Davis***FINE DINING
DETECTIVES**

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**EPICUREAN EPISODES****Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar
Excellent Sonoma Cuisine***"Three Bites" Sampler**"Padre" Thin Crust Pizza**Grilled Sonoma CK Lamb Sirloin**Coconut Panna Cotta with Blackberry Coulis*

The Fine Dining Detectives' destination on Labor Day weekend was the Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar, located just off of the Sonoma Plaza adjacent to The Lodge at Sonoma. A pleasant bar area and exhibition kitchen overlooks a large dining room and herb/vegetable garden. We especially loved the unique chandeliers, accentuating some whimsical wine-themed art.

Executive Chef Ercolino Crugnale has been at Carneros Bistro for more than a year now. He was trained at the Culinary Institute of America. His first accomplishment was to develop close business relationships with local farmers and artisan producers, so he would be assured of obtaining an abundant supply of the finest and freshest meat and produce. On most days, many ingredients for his wine country-inspired dinners are picked from their own garden.

We were escorted to a table near a window with a full view of the exhibition kitchen, the garden and an outdoor dining area. Our waitress, Janna Raye, was soon at our table helping us with our wine and cuisine choices. We started out with some Evian bottled water and ordered the Bistro's Flights of Wine. Appetizers soon followed and they were all excellent. You must try the "Three Bites" sampler featuring a Lemon Cucumber-Melon Salad with feta cheese and mint, White Corn-Foie Gras Agnolotti with Chervil, and Seared Scallop with Gypsy Piperade. It was perfect for sharing and the tastes were sensational. The Wood-Oven Roasted Mussels with fennel, compound garlic butter and Hobb's bacon had a terrific broth. This is a rich, overly-

generous dish that could easily be a meal with the addition of a salad and a glass of wine.

We had two salads that we really enjoyed. The Heirloom Tomato Salad with fresh Mozzarella over grilled Ciabatta and Basil Vinaigrette was one of the best we had ever tasted. It was a true testament to growing your own tomatoes and picking them ripe just in time for dinner. The other salad we loved was the Butter Lettuce Salad with Golden Bud Peaches, Pine nuts and Pancetta-Chervil Vinaigrette.

They thought we were crazy but we ordered a pizza for our next course. It turned out to be an excellent idea. We had the "Padre" which was a thin crust pizza made with crushed tomato sauce, Niman Ranch "Salame Nostro" and two cheeses. It was the perfect intermezzo before our entrees.

The Entrees are all right-sized portions and all feature fabulous vegetables. Our favorite was the Grilled Sonoma CK Lamb Sirloin with lamb sausage stuffed gypsy pepper; eggplant relish and Italian frying pepper aioli. It was tender and juicy and the flavors were a true taste sensation. We also really enjoyed the Grilled Pork T-Bone with Gravenstein Apples and Potato Pancake. It was also pleasingly moist and tender. The Mesquite- and Almond-wood grilled Filet Mignon -- which is healthy, and antibiotic/hormone free -- was very tender as well. It was served with a fabulous German Butterball potato and heirloom tomato salad and garden Anaheim peppers with Point Reyes Blue Cheese. Once again, the home grown vegetables made a huge difference.

The Desserts created by Pastry Chef David Leyva were all excellent. The Coconut Panna Cotta with Blackberry

Coulis was very light and delicious. The Frog Hollow Peach Crostata with Fromage Blanc Gelato was so fabulous that our Dining Assistant finished it before the rest of us had a chance to taste it.

The Wine List has received numerous awards, including the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence. Brian Nicholson and Christopher Sawyer are the Wine Stewards. The wine list features Sonoma Wines and includes 24 wines by the glass and 8 tasting flights. We opted for the tasting flights. The 2004 Sauvignon Republic -- Sauvignon Blanc from the Russian River Valley -- was the best of the Sauvignon Blanc Flight. The 2003 T. R. Elliot Pinot Noir Queste Russian River Valley was the darkest and richest, and the best of the Pinot Noir Flight.

Lyn Maher, the Director of Restaurants stopped by to tell us a little about the restaurant and Lodge. She was pleased to announce that they were approaching their fifth anniversary and that there were many special events planned for the occasion. These events can be found on their web site: thelodgeatsonoma.com.

We left feeling satisfied but not stuffed, the highest compliment after a big meal, and we look forward to returning to Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar soon.

Post Notes:

*Carneros Bistro
& Wine Bar*

The Lodge at Sonoma
1325 Broadway
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Open 7 Days for breakfast, lunch, an afternoon menu, and dinner