

Oyster Pointers



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It's time to celebrate, Part II

By Peg Moore

Now that the nurturing traditions of white tablecloth restaurants have bounced back into fashion, tables at our best restaurants are more difficult to snag. It is smart to reserve well ahead of time for luxurious pampering and some of the tastiest food in the world.

Charleston Grill sets standards for service and hospitality

Charleston Grill has been at the top of the list for celebratory dinners for over two decades. In recent years more locals have become regulars. And why not? Charleston Grill has it all — an excellent chef in Michelle Weaver, a beautiful room, festive music and a manager I always think of as “Mr. Hospitality.”

Manager Mickey Bakst makes every night feel celebratory. One of my warmest memories of dinner at Charleston Grill followed an unpleasant day we spent at the airport, waiting for our flight to New York. When it became obvious that our plane was not going to be fixed, we headed back downtown to be well treated by Charleston Grill.

Mickey is obsessed with having all diners happy and smiling. He expects all servers to follow the fundamentals of good service. What Mickey focuses on is the body language of servers. He wants to be sure they respond to the mood of



IMAGE COURTESY CHARLESTON GRILL

Mickey Bakst is “Mr. Hospitality” at Charleston Grill.

diners. Somehow Mickey manages to cruise the restaurant, communicating with all guests and also to be there when you arrive and leave. His joy and enthusiasm are contagious.

The Charleston Grill menu is designed to cater to whatever you crave, from haute French to Lowcountry comfort food — from foie gras to catfish country captain stew with Anson Mills rice middlins.

Christmas dinner will feature oysters, foie gras, beef tenderloin, rack of lamb, seafood — a tempting three courses for \$95.

The whole experience matters to Chef Craig Deihl at Cypress

Cypress is one of the most exemplary of our fine-dining restaurants. Award-winning celebrity chef Craig Deihl is modestly aware that what happens beyond the kitchen is also crucial. “The whole

experience matters — it’s not just good food. I want to see respect for fine dining — for tableside preparations, stocks and sauces, great service and experience.”

Craig does not feel the casual happy-go-lucky attitude bodes well for the future — “We need to have a firm foothold in the past without losing sight of the future.” He would like to see the young respect quality, old-school techniques and artisanal food: “What are we paying for?”

You get your money’s worth at Cypress. Caesar salads are served tableside. Besides a perfect chateaubriand (of Certified Angus Beef, of course), the kitchen offers such other celebratory dishes as smoked salmon Wellington, steak Diane and a dessert soufflé.

Even just a hamburger can be a celebratory



IMAGE BY GRAHAM HALEY

Michael's on the Alley does beef right.

experience at Cypress. Where else can you feast on a burger in a bar aglow with white tablecloths and graciousness? What’s more, it is quiet enough for conversation.

Champagne and steak

Who does not feel celebratory over steak and champagne?

Michael's on the Alley and Oak Steakhouse also celebrate the sensibility of the times — the no-fat mania has been discredited. Beef is back.

Michael's on the Alley features a casual, clubby ambience of dark wood, white tablecloths and attentive service. Perfect steaks are not the only attractions; veggies are serious here, too. Caesar salad is served tableside.

Chef Aaron Lemieux is a certified mushroom forager and a serious locavore. The cauliflower soup is memorable. There’s festive music drifting in from Victor Social Club.

with comfort foods. Chef Jeremiah Bacon is famous for using Certified Angus Beef. There are also some of the best oysters in town, house-made pastas, Hudson Valley foie gras and an artisanal cheese plate from Goat.Sheep.Cow.

Magnolias, icon of New Southern cuisine

Magnolias ignited a culinary renaissance in Charleston when it opened in 1990, paving the way for countless other restaurants across the South.

Respectful of Charleston traditions, the menu has always featured traditional ingredients and cooking techniques. Donald Barickman, who was the first executive chef and a co-founder of the restaurant, was a pioneer of New Southern cooking. He introduced such dishes as the famous down-South egg roll, house-made potato chips served with crumbled blue cheese and scallops and house-made pimento cheese.

Kelly Franz, the current executive chef, believes consistency is important to Magnolias’ continuing popularity. Along with old favorites, she includes evolving trends. Kelly is a member of the Charleston chapter of Les Dames d’Escoffier and was a runner-up in the Food Network’s *Cutthroat Kitchen*.

Open daily and not closing between lunch and dinner, Magnolias makes it possible for locals to enjoy a traditional three o'clock dinner.

Celebrate casually
All ages enjoy a feast of