



Pan-seared U-10 sea scallops with corn

SEASIDE DELIGHT

Vero Beach's Citrus Grillhouse is a taste of the genteel Florida of yesteryear.

BY MARK SPIVAK



Napoleon of roasted red peppers, herbed goat cheese and marcona almonds

"Life is short," states the credo. "Eat good food." It's hard to argue with this philosophy, especially when the food comes from the Citrus Grillhouse in Vero Beach.

Scott Varricchio opened Citrus in March 2010. Varricchio is a chef with a hefty resume: a pastry apprenticeship at Manhattan's legendary La Côte Basque, followed by stints at Picasso in Las Vegas and New York's Ovest and 'Cesca. Judging by the subtle harmony of his cuisine, his stint at Picasso with Julian Serrano appears to have left an indelible mark on his soul.

His restaurant is perched on the edge of the ocean in Vero, in a building with a wraparound porch that contains a bar and outdoor seating. The interior dining room is small, accommodating perhaps 60 covers, with an open kitchen and another bar manned by a mixologist who clearly enjoys his work. The planked wooden floor comes from an old tobacco barn, and the mahog-

any tables overlook stunning water views.

Begin with something as simple as a salad of baby arugula, heirloom tomatoes and shaved pecorino and roasted garlic in a lemon-thyme vinaigrette (\$9), and you'll see the virtues of this place. The flavors are clear, direct and pristine, highlighted by the quality of the olive oil. The pasta section is more than a nod to Varricchio's Italian heritage. It is a short but impressive selection of dishes done to perfection. A half-order of pappardelle with rock shrimp (\$12) is the ultimate comfort food. The beautifully undercooked shellfish napped in a slightly spicy sauce is infused with the tang of a seafood reduction. Another half-order of linguine (\$12) is crisply *al dente*, offset with baby spinach, scampi butter and more of those tasty heirloom tomatoes.

Among the main courses, veal flank steak (\$22) is a thing of beauty. Marked by the grill, tender and flavorful, it arrives garnished with sautéed cannellini beans.

Pan-seared U-10 scallops (\$27) are sweet and plump, escorted by polenta cakes and corn sautéed in chili butter. Varricchio offers a substantial, rotating list of daily specials as well.

Should you have room for it, the most popular dessert is the assortment of mini-bites (\$8): key lime pie with crème fraîche lime cream, dark chocolate citrus cake with dark chocolate ice cream and lemon cheesecake with chantilly cream. There are dessert specials as well, such as the orange and chocolate bread pudding offered on the evening of our visit.

The wine list is short but well-focused—perhaps one dozen whites and 15 reds, with a mix of commercial and boutique labels at attractive prices. A bottle of Whitehaven Sauvignon Blanc (\$30) is a nice match with the assertively seasoned food. There is a good selection of spirits as



Spicy seared tuna with lemon-scented orzo, pepper relish and pickled red onion

well, particularly 10 or 12 small-batch rums that make a good stand-in for dessert.

Service is friendly, knowledgeable and well-paced. The only minor glitch is the presence of robotic food runners who clear tables before your entrée and inquire if everything is all right after you've finished.

A visit to Vero Beach can feel like a glimpse of Old Florida. Citrus Grillhouse is a throwback to a time when food was crafted with pride and attention to detail. ♦

CITRUS GRILLHOUSE

WHERE: 1050 Easter Lily Lane, Vero Beach (772-234-4114; citrusgrillhouse.com) **OPEN:** Lunch Monday through Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; dinner daily starting at 5 p.m. **FOOD:** Creative New American **ATMOSPHERE:** Comfortable, with stunning water views **SERVICE:** Knowledgeable and well-paced **RESERVATIONS:** Recommended **PRICE:** Moderate **DRESS:** Smart casual



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ROCHE BOBOIS

A new, 6,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art showroom in North Palm Beach expands the presence of international home furnishings company Roche Bobois, which operates 240 retail showrooms in 40 countries, including 24 locations in the United States. The latest showroom, the second in Florida, joins Coral Gables in offering "Les Contemporains and Les Nouveaux Classiques" collections exclusive to the brand. Since the brand was born in 1961, when two French family businesses merged, Roche Bobois has become a worldwide symbol of fine, European-made furniture, design and distribution. The newest location, at 136 U.S. Highway 1, is south of Northlake Boulevard.

North Palm Beach: 136 U.S. Hwy. 1; 561-835-4982
Coral Gables: 450 Biltmore Way; 305-444-1168
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