

Five Towns Restaurant Review

Max's Grille & Tavern

On Sept 1, 1997, Max's Grille and Tavern opened its doors in the heart of Rockville Centre's bustling restaurant "row" on Park Avenue, to the outstanding welcome of the families, businesses, and partiers who patronize this formidable establishment. Designed by the architect who created Docks and Carmines on Manhattan's Upper West side, it has a warm and spirited decor which invites comfort and merriment while you dine and drink. Along with its atmospheric lighting, framed posters and blackboard of specials, the tables are adorned with candles to relax you even before you order a drink.

I arrived on a Wednesday evening after the dinner crowd started to fade, and that wasn't until after 9 o'clock. Most nights are very busy, and reservations are suggested to guarantee your seating. Charlie Lunenfeld, our gracious host, partner and day to day operations manager, along with George Korten of George Martin, Rockville Centre and Southampton, and Nick Diangelo fame is charming and hospitable. A food lover with many years of experience in some of Manhattan's finest eateries, he's a man of his food (and word). We had the most comfortable seat in the house, a booth that could comfortably seat 5, nestled in the left side corner of the dining room.

He proceeded to send out some of the finest trendy samples to illustrate the enormity of their diverse menu with both, old time favorites, pub standards, and gourmet creations to satisfy even the most discriminating palates.

One of their favored soups arrived shortly thereafter. The classic New England Clam Chowder, a la Max's, eliminates the potatoes and substitutes spinach, which is a dieter's dream. Of course, the cream and the touch of flour will add a few inches, but who cares? It was wonderfully light and tasty. Next, an assortment of some of their choice appetizers followed including the spicy popcorn shrimp with a remoulade sauce, coconut shrimp with an orange and apricot marmalade sauce which was sweet and spicy and the buffalo shrimp with bleu cheese and crudite. This is one of their more popular appetizers and is featured on the menu as Max's Three-Way Shrimp Sampling. I am highly recommending it. Also on the appetizer menu, is the calamari fritti with marinara sauce, which was excellent. For cheese lovers, the prosciutto wrapped mozzarella served warm with chopped tomatoes, mesclun and onions in a balsamic vinaigrette is an innovative answer to the more typical tomato and mozzarella, basil and olive oil. The unusual spinach and cheese dip with artichoke hearts and imported cheeses served with colorful tortilla chips and salsa evokes memories of fondue, but with a bit more "south of the border" flair.

To bring us down to earth a bit, we sampled the Chopped Bistro Salad, a mixture of hearts of romaine, fresh mozzarella, golden raisins, roasted peppers, toasted pecans and red onion in a balsamic vinaigrette. This salad is a piquant mix of flavors that delicately balances both sweet and tart quite nicely, providing a wholesome and filling course, which is easily a meal in itself.

Next, their homemade Chicken Pot Pie arrived to begin the march of entrees. It is one of the classic all time favorites they have re-invented and was absolutely fabulous. The crust is light, flaky and tasty and once perforated, it allows the pungent chicken flavored, light broth mixed with chunks of white meat chicken and vegetables to emerge. A retro experience! which conjures up notions of comfort and old-fashioned fun. Another favorite on the menu for hefty appetites is the Steak and Pasta combination. I wouldn't recommend it for those low fat aficionados, but for those young and still growing or for those who don't care, the linguini with grilled skirt steak, creamed spinach and crispy fried onions is a meal in itself! The steak is excellent and the creamed spinach and linguini is very tasty. This is definitely an answer to your most primal cravings. Indulge!

My preference is for the Grilled Ginger Teriyaki Crusted Tuna that arrived topped with a wasabi cream sauce and vegetable tempura, a fusion experience that indulges my need for light and flavorful and more waist friendly seafood, which was excellent. Of course, the tempura adds the fried no no's, but creatively complements the Asian influenced entrée with panache.

The finale of over the top desserts and assortments of café ole's, cappuccinos, and after dinner drinks will leave you so satiated that you might need a walk around the block before you sit again in your car and head home for another seat.

The Chocolate Peanut Butter Silk Pie, like its name, is smooth and silky with crushed peanuts and whipped cream on top of a chocolate mousse with an oreo cookie crust. It was completely indulgent and will be sure to satisfy any sweet tooth's craving. The warm Chocolate Decadence a la mode with raspberry coulis was also completely decadent! Rich, chocolaty and "low calorie," just kidding. Artfully displayed with squiggles of raspberry dripping on the plate and gracing the velvet sheen of its surface, it appeals to every one of the senses. A bite of this can give new meaning to romance.

Other specialties on their menu include Sweet potato fries and Maryland Lump Crabcakes for appetizers, a Classic Caesar and Karen's Seafood Salad, a mix of mesclun greens tossed with crispy calamari and popcorn shrimp in a cilantro lime vinaigrette served over a crisp tortilla and a Fresh seared mango tuna salad with black beans, mesclun greens, fresh mango and crispy wonton noodles tossed in a ginger lime vinaigrette. From their "Lost Classics" menu, a Baked Macaroni and Cheese with baby shells, Vermont cheddar and toasted bread crumbs and a Piled High double cut Meat Loaf served with mashed potatoes, gravy and crispy onions. Other pastas include the classic Rigatoni alla vodka or a Sloppy Lasagna Bolognese. Among the "Large Plates" which include a house salad are the "Inside Out" Chicken Cordon Bleu, a breaded chicken breast, prosciutto and melted Swiss with mashed potato and country gravy or a Traditional Fajita with grilled peppers, onions, fresh tomato salsa and sour cream with chicken, steak, vegetable or steak and chicken. Novelties from the

Max's Grille & Tavern

13 North Park Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY

516-678-1290

Average Check \$15-\$20 - Reservations Accepted

Credit Cards Amex, Visa, MC

Lunch 7 days from 11:30-4 • Dinner

grill include Barbecued St. Louis Cut Spare Ribs with Max's homemade sauce or Max's Mixed Grill of honey glazed chicken, shrimp and marinated steak. Other choices from the dessert menu include a George Martin Brownie Sundae, New York Cheesecake, Oreo Cookies n' Cream Pie, Pub Style Banana Cream Pie, Apple Strudel a la mode and a selection of Sorbet and Gelato.

Whether you are looking for trendy pub creations, good old fashioned "lost classics" or innovative gourmet fare, you will find it at Max's Grille and Tavern. In addition to their standard dinner menu, they serve a three course pre-theatre dinner Monday through Friday, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. which features many of their famous specials from the dinner menu. Every day is happy during Happy Hour from 4pm to 7pm when they serve a complimentary buffet which includes meatloaf, tempura, fish and chips, pastas, chili, hot dogs, wings, and Shepherd's pie. They boast a fantastic Sun-

day Brunch which is served with a complimentary Bloody Mary, Mimosa, Screwdriver or freshly squeezed juice of your choice and features some yummy favorites like Steak and Eggs and Max's Benedicts along with their innovative Walnut Cinnamon and Raison French Toast with country sausage or their Vienna Style Apple Pancake.

Max's Grille and Tavern is a friendly, neighborhood eatery that offers excellent food in a warm, cozy, comfortable environment.

See you there!
Bettina Marks.

Mon-Thurs from 5-11
Fri & Sat - from 5-12
Sunday -- from 4-10

Sunday Brunch
From 11:30-3:30

Pre-Theatre Menu

3-Course Dinner
Includes Beverage

Only
\$16⁹⁵

Mon-Fri. (5-7pm)

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MAX'S
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Charlie Lunenfeld - Manager/Owner
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