

Miami Grand

As its name suggests, this jewel of a restaurant in Rockville Centre is inspired by and reflects the chic ambience of South Beach (Miami Beach, that is) in both its cuisine and upscale atmosphere. Although the décor was adapted from Asia di Cuba (one of my favorite spots on Madison in lower midtown), the theme is definitely MIAMI...hot and sexy.

Upon entering the dining room, the sensual "balloon-like" white walls of fabric contrasted with austere tall wooden chairs and palm trees create just the right comfort zone to set you at ease and help you to relax, even before you have a drink. Four-foot chandeliers evoke elegant and sophisticated parties, offering just the right amount of light to accent the décor and illuminate your table, which was graced with foot long menus housed in faux leopard fur — an exotic touch.

Rob Mioni (owner, designer, ex-film producer/actor and very gracious host) greeted us in his charming manner. Christina, our server, brought us the "amuse" (translated, "to tease your taste buds") of chopped tomatoes and chopped onions with aioli on flatbread.

Sipping my Merlot helped to appease my whet appetite when our Mango Salad arrived. Served on red oak leaf lettuce with water chestnuts, diced mango and goat cheese in a sun dried tomato tortilla, it was both visually exciting (very colorful) and terribly tasty. A basket of foccaccia with yummy herb butter complemented the salad and the bite I sampled was fresh and moist.

A chilled canoe for two in a pineapple followed, one of the five appetizers we sampled. Filled with mussels, shrimp, scallops and calamari in a toasted pumpkin seed and lime vinaigrette, it was a delicious, perfectly seasoned and beautifully prepared seafood salad. The crab spring

rolls with a chapotle aioli in roasted pepper cream were outstanding. Light and flavorful, they didn't hurt my waistline too much, nor did the homemade potato chips because the oil was clean and fresh. The Asian lobster dumplings with shrimp mousse in a ginger dipping sauce were also light and pungent. The fried calamari served with a tomato lemon sauce and cilantro with tequila spiked red sauce was special. It is one of my favorite dishes, although I have to run an extra mile after I eat it. But, this version was especially light, so maybe I could get a way with only a half mile. The black bean dumplings were also fried, but light, seasoned with tangy cilantro and might only have added an extra 1/8 mile to my workout the next day. Not to worry and worth every bite.

A lemon sorbet with a sprig of mint to cleanse the palate appeared and, voile, off to the next course.

A taste of four special entrees followed.

A Lobster Risotto with chunks of sweet Maine Lobster, plantains, sweet peppers and corn in a yellow tomato beurre blanc sauce was perfectly prepared. It was creamy, but light, with just the right amount of punch. The medallions of Pan Seared Duck served over garlic-mashed potatoes with apple were very tasty and rich. Thinly sliced, tender pieces of duck, which is usually fatty, were lean and sumptuous. I highly recommend it. The South Beach Sea Bass, crusted with basil and red onion over wasabe mashed potatoes and sautéed spinach was a little bland for my taste. For those of you who don't do spice, it will be just right. The Ocean Drive Snapper crusted with plantains and pine nuts over pineapple fried rice with a stake of rosemary and an onion medley roast on top with mango ginger sauce is an exotic example of Miami's

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grand epicurean delights and, the reggae was appropriately timed to accompany this dish.

As we digested the superb meal, we anxiously awaited our specially prepared dessert. The finale arrived, a dark chocolate soufflé with a white chocolate anglais. WOW! The soufflé looks like a molten lava volcano. When the white chocolate is carefully dripped on top in front of your eyes, it becomes more than a food experience. Even before you taste it, it is sexy. The dark chocolate oozes and is perfectly "not too sweet." One bite is all you need to enjoy one of the most heavenly experiences comparable to?... a night out in South Beach? Or? "They" say that chocolate produces the same dopamine and serotonin levels in the body's chemistry that LOVE does. Perfect punctuation to a perfect meal.

Miami Grand offers intimate dining for special occasions and could be just right, if you get a corner table for romantic interludes.

They offer a pre-fixe menu Sunday through Thursday for \$29.95 that includes four courses. If you would like to have an after dinner drink next door at their Baby Grand piano bar, they waive the cover charge for those who have dined at Miami. There is live music Thursday through Sunday.

Vamos a la South Beach!
Bon appetit!

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