

Atlantic City Weekly®

What's happening at the Jersey Shore

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Dining Out

High Dune

Margate's Dune offers cozy chic with eclectic fare

By Sandy Posnak



DUNE IS A CHARMING newcomer to Margate's thriving restaurant scene. Seafood plays a starring role here and the restaurant's casual ambiance reflects this with walls covered with photographs of fishermen holding their prize catches, a 1929 photo of Hackney's (a once-upon-a-time Atlantic City seafood restaurant) and other vintage fish-related photos collected by restaurant proprietor Nick Weinstein.

Prior to its late-June opening, the building that was previously home to the Madison Avenue Café was cleverly revamped by Bill and Michele Collins of Painted River Studio in Corbin City. Weathered looking wainscoting, burlap table covers topped with glass, and other tastefully placed items make the room resemble a comfy fishermen's retreat.

Although seafood dominates the menu, chicken and steak were also available on the night of our recent visit. The menu features appetizers such as oysters, little neck clams, colossal crab meat and colossal shrimp. But it also lists some rare finds for this area, like mirin and truffle poached scallops with leeks and shiitake mushrooms, and king salmon tartare dished with osetra caviar, shaved red onion, avocado and a black truffle vinaigrette.

Among the restaurant's popular entrées are Alaska wild red king salmon, grilled yellowfin tuna, grilled black cod in a mushroom consommé with heirloom tomatoes, fennel and lemon confit; jumbo lump crabmeat cakes and free range organic chicken breast. Entrées range in price from \$17.95 for the chicken dish to \$30.95 for the black cod.

Crunchy oyster crackers and a wonderful, tangy homemade horseradish are served at Dune instead of bread and butter. A nice touch and very much in keeping with the seafood house premise, but I also would have enjoyed some bread with my meal. Complimentary marinated shrimp sevice delivered in large Asian-styled spoons came as a pleasant surprise.

My dining partner wished to order the onion soup that was listed on the prix fixe menu but was told that it was only available to those ordering from the prix fixe menu. So, instead of the soup he ordered the colossal shrimp appetizer (\$11.95) and was served three humongous shrimp that weighed in at about half-a-pound total and were equally large in flavor. His crab cakes entrée (\$25.95) included two delicately coated, pan-seared, 100-percent jumbo all-lump crab cakes that exploded with flavor. The platter was accompanied by shoe-string French fries and watercress-grilled pineapple salad.

The prix fixe menu, priced at \$25.95, is a bargain. It includes an entrée choice of Alaska wild red king salmon, black cod or chicken; onion soup or Dune salad and homemade raspberry sorbet. I started with the salad, a wonderful, colorful mix comprised of a mound of organic greens, tender asparagus and whole baby yellow string beans, all topped with an aged sherry vinaigrette. My entrée choice was the seared Alaska wild red king salmon,

which differs from regular salmon in texture (it's softer), flavor (it's rich and robust) and color (reddish). The salmon was served with the skin side up (it was crispy and seasoned) over perfectly cooked broccoli raab, and surrounded by oven roasted grape tomatoes and a creamy white sauce.

Husband Dan topped off his meal with a yummy warm chocolate brownie sundae drizzled with chocolate and caramel sauces and served with fresh raspberries, whipped cream and a generous portion of homemade coffee ice cream (\$6.00). My raspberry sorbet was also homemade. Service was competent throughout the meal, except for the fact that crumbs remained on the glass table top when our tea and desserts were served.

Just about everything at Dune that can be homemade is homemade, thanks to the culinary expertise of executive chef Jason Hanin. He makes the horseradish, all of the baked desserts, the ice cream and sorbets (flavors change frequently), and we have a feeling that he'll have a hand in the bread, which, due to the request of customers, will be served with meals in the near future.

Dune has everything to make it a go. Chef Hanin graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, and was employed in many upscale eateries, including Philadelphia's Striped Bass. The 31-year-old chef buys the Dune produce from farmers who practice sustainable pasture farming (they strive not to damage the environment) and purchases meats from farms that raise vegetarian-fed animals. "The end result is incredible flavored products," he says.

And when it comes to freshness and quality of ingredients, Weinstein doesn't believe in stinting, either. And so when the two first met to discuss Hanin's cooking philosophy, Weinstein knew that he had found the chef that he was fishing for.

Weinstein has been in the restaurant business since he was 15 years old. He worked in many Jersey shore eateries during his high school years, and after earning a degree in hotel restaurant management from Penn State,

he served as front of the house manager of Philadelphia restaurant magnate Steven Starr's Tangerine and Continental restaurants. "I always dreamed of opening my own restaurant at the shore," he said during an after dinner chat at Dune. Dreams do come true.

Dune Restaurant, 9510 Ventnor Ave., Margate, is currently open for dinner Wednesday - Sunday from 5pm - 10pm. Closed Thanksgiving Day. Multi-course chef tasting dinners offered if entire table participates; call in advance to discuss this. Off-site and on-site catering; children's menu; BYOB; non-smoking restaurant. Visa, MC and American Express cards accepted. Reservations welcome. Phone 487-7450.