



RESTAURANT REVIEW

Dune Just Fine

Margate's Dune offers ambiance and exquisite menu

by [Sharon Harris-Zlotnick](#)

When owner Nick Weinstein opened Dune in Margate two years ago, he and Executive Chef Jason Hanin wanted to create a restaurant that would please those customers who really understood quality dining. Both have extensive culinary experience in fine restaurants and the casinos.

Weinstein hired Painted River Studios to transform the restaurant's interior to reflect a soft seaside ambiance. The walls have a white pine stained finish; burlap tightly surrounds each glass-covered table. Many of the chairs have a crackled paint effect, and tile in the front simulates wood.

My friend Sherrie and I found a good-sized crowd for a Wednesday evening in late May, preceding the big Memorial Day weekend. Our seats in the back provided a wonderful view of many historic pictures and posters, depicting Atlantic City in its glory days, on the walls. Looking at these priceless shots is a stroll down memory lane. We learned that Weinstein's relatives were in some of the photos.

Unlike Hackney's, a great Atlantic City dining landmark featured in a 1930s picture, Dune is a seafood restaurant featuring eclectic fare. No simple fish and fries here.

We brought wine and Eva, our server, immediately poured for us. We never saw, nor were we offered a wine bucket. I noticed that none of the other tables had wine buckets either, which would have kept the wine cold during the entire meal.

Eva served fresh rolls from a basket. Reminiscent of a true fish house, a dish of oyster crackers was on the table. Olive oil, filled with green olives, accompanied the rolls. I asked for plain olive oil, which was then served with butter as an alternative.

We shared grilled calamari, one of several appetizers (average \$9) on the menu. We are all familiar with the fried version, but the Dune's style included small, grilled calamari with chopped tomatoes and fried capers over lettuce. Surprisingly, the preparation dulled the saltiness of the capers, which allowed the calamari's flavor to come through. Other



Executive Chef Jason Hanin and the Margate eatery.

interesting sounding appetizers included mussels in a champagne broth and chilled seafood.

When we ordered our entrees, Eva explained the different fishes, offering some details about their origins and the preparation. Dune includes some rare varieties not typically seen on local menus. Except for a hanger steak, the entire entree menu spotlights approximately 10 a la carte fish and seafood entrees, mostly priced in the high \$20s.

I ordered the skate fish, cooked in a nutty-flavored brown butter, and served with asparagus, homemade gnocchi and peas. Sherrie decided to try the black bass, served with chorizo sausage. Our plan was to share the two platters. Skate fish is a light, flaky fish that swims at the bottom of the ocean; the black bass comes from the Mediterranean region.

For me, the perfectly cooked skate was the clear winner. The brown butter added a wonderful nutty flavor. My homemade gnocchi had a hint of herbs infused into the potato mixture. I did not like the black bass as much, partially because it had been lightly peppered when prepared. Sherrie liked both equally, but said she would order the skate if she returned.

We split the platters, which worked out fine. I do not think that the portions would be enough for someone with a larger appetite.

The service was quite attentive. Coincidentally, Sherrie knew Lauren, another server, whose brother is a close friend of Sherrie's son. Lauren gave us some added attention. She must be fairly new because Eva had Lauren recite the dessert list. She did a good job of explaining the five choices, and we narrowed it down to the inverted apple tart with vanilla ice cream or the coffee-flavored crème brulee.

We were truly stuck, and settled the dilemma with a coin toss. The coffee crème brulee won, and we figured that it would be lighter and less caloric. Wrong assumption. Chef Hanin visited our table to chat about the meal, and informed us that he makes all the desserts himself, using the best butter, cream and sugars he can find.

Hanin also described their upcoming Chef's Tasting program. The weekly Monday event will begin in the next few weeks. Priced in the \$40s per person, each table will enjoy six or seven courses, either built around a theme or Hanin's whim. There will be no head count minimum, but the entire group must participate to maintain an even flow of foods from the kitchen. It was obvious that Hanin loves talking about food and quality dining.

Dune's Early Bird special is another popular option. Served from 5-6:15pm for \$24.95, diners receive a salad, a choice of three special entrees not on the regular menu, and a dessert.

Dune is located at 9510 Ventnor Ave., Margate. The phone number is 487-7450. Reservations are highly recommended. BYOB. Free parking is available on the street and major credit cards accepted. Beginning over the next few weeks, Dune will be open for dinner from 5-10pm everyday but Tuesday.