

ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Port Restaurant and Bar is Chic and Satisfying

Port's Presence

Port Restaurant and Bar in Corona del Mar is a fine place to repack your culinary suitcase and have a fetching dining experience.

Tucked a few feet from the ocean on Heliotrope Avenue, this space was a casual local hangout called Pirate's Inn for a long run. Then, a chef took ownership and called the place Trees for a relatively short span before it disintegrated. Alas, we loved and lost Mistral, the next incarnation that took its name from the unruly winds that scour the Provence region of France in certain seasons. It too was eventually sold to yet another owner who had a very short run with his Svelte name and idea.

Then, two and a half years ago, along came Ali Zadeh—businessman, lover of fine food and good wine, bon vivant and, most certainly, an intent host - who gave the restaurant an intensive and inviting makeover. It's now quite chic while being ultra friendly. The rooms are punctuated with a lot of good art, custom architectural details and a cool adjoining bar.

Patrick and I merrily trekked through some of the menu with this paper's publisher, Richard Reisman, his charming girlfriend, Anita Modha, our executive editor Rick Reiff and his wife, Mary Ann Brown. Makes it easier to try several things with a table of six or so.

For appetizers, don't miss the crispy gnocchi with spinach and morel mushrooms. Crab cakes sit atop fennel salad and are dappled with chipotle sauce, classic coconut shrimp have a jaunty sweet chile sauce, ahi tartar is a good textural counterpoint to the crunch of lotus root and spicy shrimp or a bowl of clams and mussels keeps the interest flowing.

Entrees on our plates included salmon with a white wine and shrimp sauce, seared sea bass with a tad bit of brown butter sauce and nice garden vegetables, a swell plate of seafood pasta, tender braised short ribs and a couple of selections from the steak, chops and lamb entrees. All were quite satisfying.

Someone obviously paid a lot of attention in putting together the eclectic and international wine list. A few that would add pizzazz to any meal without emptying the wallet: Trimbach Reserve pinot grigio, Saint Supery sauvignon blanc, Dutton Goldfield pinot noir, BV Tapestry red wine, Lancaster or Whitehall Lane cabernets, Ridge "California Mountain" zinfandel-syrah blend or Chateau Taillefer from the Pomerol region of Bordeaux. To go along with some full-flavored sweets at the end of your meal, there's a fine selection of dessert wines.

Port should be added to your dining list since the great tastes are complemented by sensible prices and superb atmosphere. Dinner appetizers are \$8 to \$16, entrees \$26 to \$38.



**EXECUTIVE
DINING**
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