

Crescent City craving: Liliana's serves up a fine New Orleans experience

By **Bill Livick**

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FITCHBURG

With a freshly cut carnation and white linen at each table, New Orleans-style fine dining has arrived in Fitchburg in the form of Liliana's.

The attractive, 5,000-square-foot restaurant is the brainchild of David Heide, an experienced chef but first-time restaurateur. Heide and chef de cuisine Annie O'Hara both had been working at Coliquot restaurant in Madison before Liliana's opened in November.

The restaurant consists of an elegant dining area with lots of windows, as well as a bar and lounge area where jazz musicians perform three nights a week (Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays). Heide designed his restaurant in the Crescent City style, with black wrought iron, Mardi Gras beads and stylized photos of Louisiana street musicians circling the dining room. A handsome wall-to-ceiling wine rack separates the bar and lounge from the

dining area.

We've visited Liliana's for lunch and dinner, pleased with the service and the food each time. The restaurant's wait staff is friendly and attentive, returning often to fill water glasses and attend to diners' needs.

Even better is the cuisine. The menu features mostly traditional, well-prepared Cajun dishes. The list of appetizers includes hush puppies, crab cakes, prawns in garlic and herbs, cornmeal crusted calamari, raw oysters and okra fritters, among others.

The roster of main courses is truly impressive: barbecued pork spare ribs, spicy jambalaya, shrimp and crawfish étouffée, country-fried chicken, black Angus ribeye steak with potato purée and field greens, and red beans and rice with andouille sausage.

Liliana's also serves two vegetarian options: blackened seitan (wheat gluten) with sweet potato puree and a field-green salad, and roasted red peppers and wild mushrooms with bucatini pasta in a pesto cream sauce.

Liliana's

Location: 2951 Triverton Pike Drive, Fitchburg.

Telephone: (608) 442-4444.

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. lunch Monday-Saturday; 5-9 p.m. dinner daily.

Reservations: Accepted.

Credit cards: Accepted.

Wheelchair accessible: Yes.

Nonsmoking: Yes.

Vegetarian options: Yes.

Menu: Liliana's offers seven appetizers ranging in price from \$6-\$12. A highlight is the New Orleans charcuterie platter: andouille, tasso (pork), boudin sausages, crawfish and alligator sausages (\$11). The menu offers more than a half-dozen soup and salad choices, priced from \$5-\$12. Check out the filé gumbo: shrimp, andouille, organic

chicken and fresh oysters (\$12). Eleven main courses are priced from \$14-\$24. One of the most interesting entrees: sea scallops with ratatouille, fennel leek mash, fried leeks and chive oil (\$17).

Ratings

Food: 

Service: 

Cost: \$14-\$24

Value: 

5 plates—Outstanding
4 plates—Above average
3 plates—Average
2 plates—Below average
1 plate—Poor

I stopped in for lunch a few weeks ago and enjoyed a house salad of mixed greens with a tangy Creole vinaigrette (\$5), coupled with a terrific black bean soup

spiked with lardon (fatty bacon) and andouille (\$6). A friend was happy with a shrimp po' boy and fries.

Meals are always accompanied by a basket of sliced

bread and a plate of virgin olive oil with black pepper.

We began a recent dinner with pint glasses of draft beer. Liliana's offers good beers from such local breweries as Lake Louie, New Glarus and Capital, as well as one selection from a Louisiana brewery. For an appetizer, we shared an order of six hush puppies stuffed with cheddar cheese and served with cherry mustard (\$7). The deep-fried dough balls are a tasty mixture of scallions, herbs and cheese.

An order of jambalaya (\$16) was spicy and meaty, with three types of Cajun pork—tasso, lardon and andouille—and a few plump, juicy shrimp. The rice and tomato-based recipe was heavy on the cayenne, so there was a distinct—though not extraordinarily hot—burn on the palate. The recipe unfortunately included lots of pork while omitting the chicken, and Liliana's version also used too much tomato as a base for my taste.

I prefer a more traditional Louisiana jambalaya—that

blend of chicken, shrimp, andouille, rice, vegetables (onion, celery, bell pepper) and Cajun herbs and spices, most notably garlic.

For diners with more sensitive palates, the kitchens' andouille-crusted tilapia (\$16) might be a better choice. The fresh-tasting fish was perfectly prepared and paired with a sweet potato cream and wild mushroom ragout that, to my taste, was a knockout. My dining companion, however, found it a little bland and preferred the jambalaya.

Liliana's offers three worthwhile desserts: beignets, Bananas Foster and a delightfully rich bourbon chocolate pecan pie.

Bill Livick is a freelance writer who writes entertainment stories and reviews Madison-area restaurants for the Gazette.