

Carlucci's Waterfront



HIROKO TANAKA / For The Inquirer

Steamed mussels is one of several appetizers available at Carlucci's Waterfront in Mount Laurel. Dining on the waterfront is always a treat. Add warmth and sunshine and flowing water, and it's even better.

It was against this backdrop that a friend and I dined last week at Carlucci's Waterfront in Mount Laurel.

The former Pirate's Inn across Rancocas Creek from the Twin Hills section of Willingboro has a beautiful brick and stone patio that the main dining room overlooks.

The tables inside are set with white cloths. Not much appears to have changed in the dining room over the years, and it could use some updating. Ahh, but the view is well worth a visit.

The place is owned by the Capuano family, and it's one of their five locations. The other one in New Jersey is in West Windsor, and there are three in Yardley, Bucks County.

The menu here is extensive, filled with recipes the family brought from Italy and with flavors from this side of the Atlantic.

Warm, crusty rolls with room-temperature, foiled-wrapped pats of butter started our meals. Then, bruschetta arrived. Try as we might, we couldn't resist.

We decided to split an appetizer. Sure, the mussels bianco (\$7.99), steamed and sauteed in olive oil, garlic, tomato and white wine, sounded wonderful. So did the clams. But we went for the Cajun Louisiana barbecue shrimp and bacon (\$7.99), five large shrimp sauteed in barbecue sauce with bits of bacon. It was billed as a spicy sauce, but there was little kick.

My dining companion ordered the island coconut shrimp luncheon platter (\$8.95), served with steamed broccoli and potatoes in brandy sauce, and a tomato-based, slightly sweet dipping sauce. We enjoyed the crunchy coconut taste of the shrimp, but would have preferred a thicker sauce for dipping. The creamy brandy sauce added good flavor to the potatoes, and the broccoli was steamed perfectly.

Veal Saporito (\$12.95) was a wonderful combination of sauteed veal medallions topped with lump crabmeat, asparagus and cream sauce. The menu says "Excellent!" in red next to it. I almost agree: The veal and asparagus were tender and the crabmeat flavorful, but the cream sauce was too thin for my taste and there was too much of it.

Overall it was a pleasant meal, and everything was nicely presented.

But it wasn't over yet.

The dessert menus arrived, and the waiter said my favorite words: "We have creme brulee today, but it's not on the menu."

My friend ordered the carrot cake (\$5.95), a large slice of moist cake with a light cream-cheese icing. To be honest, it is not something I would have selected. But this cake was good. It was sweet enough without being overwhelming.

As for the Discreet Diner's favorite dessert, the creme brulee did not disappoint. It was a larger-than-usual custard dish of the sweet, creamy blend. And the top was nicely burnt.

Add to that a good cup of coffee and a few more moments of savoring the view and we put the finishing touches on a lovely spring afternoon.

Carlucci's Waterfront

876 Centerton Rd., Mount Laurel.

Phone: 856-235-5737.

Hours:

11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Sun-Thur, and 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Fri-Sat. Live music 6 to 9 p.m. Wed and 6 to 10 p.m. Thur-Sat. Table magic 5 to 8 p.m. Sun.

Reservations: Recommended.

Handicapped accessible: Yes.

Parking: Lot.

Children's menu: Yes.

Cocktails: Yes.

On the Web: www.carluccisitaliangrill.com
