

St. Louis Eats and Drinks With Joe and Ann Pollack

Joe and Ann Pollack, St. Louis' most experienced food writers, lead a tour of restaurants, wines, shops and other interesting places. When we travel, you will travel with us. When we eat, drink, cook, entertain or read, we'll share our knowledge and opinions. Come along for the ride!!

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Mosaic Modern Fusion Restaurant

Mosaic has just introduced its spring menu. Now, if you haven't been to Mosaic, let us explain that except for desserts Mosaic's menu is exclusively tapas. Lots of different things, in small portions, to taste: Whee! We were there last week having dinner with a friendly group, and ran happily amok through much of the menu. What did we eat?

—Tuna tartare, quarter-inch dice of raw ahi tuna dressed with sesame oil, a little spicy tobiko caviar and a garnish of the seaweed that's used to wrap sushi in. Good, not unusual, but good.

—Herb gnocchi, warm and tender and not gummy, mixed with lightly cooked small asparagus tips and sauced with an asparagus-truffle sauce. Handsome and very flavorful.

—Tuscan broccoli salad, dressed with parmesan, and a vinaigrette made with dijon mustard and some blood orange oil, a few pine nuts tossed in for crunch. Particularly well-received by the West Coast representative at the table who pronounced herself "vegetable-starved."

—A deeply mushroom-y napoleon of wild mushrooms also showed off roasted garlic. A real big-flavor item, just right with a big-flavor wine.

—Tandoori-glazed chicken breast was probably the least successful of any of the plates. The chicken wasn't overcooked, but the glaze was only on part of the chicken, and the potato cake lacked excitement.

—Hummus sounds pretty calm, but this one was full of lemon, with a chopped tomato and olive relish atop it, some crumbled feta, and fresh, warm pita wedges alongside. No bland hummus here!

—A plate of cured meats included duck prosciutto, salmon pastrami, a little pumpernickel toast, some olives and manchego cheese and a dab of fig cooked with balsamico. Fun to play around with, and particularly tasty salmon, well-spiced and moist.

—"Truffled frites" said the menu. What arrived wasn't fries, but a basket of homemade potato chips, warm, sprinkled with shattered bits of parmesan cheese (that's what Mosaic called it) and a drizzle of truffle oil, another excellent pairing with big wines.

—Endive and frisee were topped with warm goat cheese, quite mild, some glazed walnuts and a pear vinaigrette, although not a sweet one, happily. Nice combo of crunch and smoothness, well-balanced flavors.

—Lamb "saltimbocca" was a couple of chops from a rack of lamb, high-quality lamb cooked rare, served with properly seasoned creamy polenta and a small bowl of warm artichoke hearts chopped with cheese, which we finished off with the remaining pita. A truly excellent dish, although, it's closer to a "scottaditta" (meaning "burn the fingers" which refers to eating meat off the bone) than a saltimbocca, which is usually a boneless cutlet.

—Soy glazed sea bass was another high point, full of flavor, served with some baby bok choy, a citrus-soy glaze and a few threads of crunchy potato.

And then there were desserts. An avocado cheesecake, dense, rich, unsweet, with blood-orange sorbet on the side, was a hit. We were surprisingly happy with the creme brulee laced with cardamom, one of the few non-classic brulees that we've been taken with. A chocolate pot de creme, which is in effect, a really rich pudding, both soothed and excited. And some caramel ice cream came with a rolled tuille cookie and some nut brittle.

As you can see, if you have enough fingers to count with, the meal was extremely successful on almost all counts. Mosaic also has a fine wine list, with many good values, and service was on the same level as the other facets.

Mosaic seems to do well with larger tables, although it's rather loud for long, serious conversations in such groups. (On the other hand, if it's just you and your sweetie, it's a great place for conversations you don't want overheard.)