

Romance at the Restaurants

by Clint Hamblin

Whether it's sharing a Chateaubriand or a couple of grilled hot dogs, there's something very romantic about taking your significant other out to dinner for Valentine's Day. These days, reasonably priced dining specials are everywhere. Let's look at a few favorites.

Union Bar and Grille is located at 1357 Washington Street, and this South End restaurant offers a selection of great standards as well as a special Valentine's Day menu.

Let's start with a Déjà Blu cocktail, a mixture of Stoli Blueberi, St-Germain, pineapple, champagne and a couple of bobbing blueberries. Easy to drink, this fruity concoction is a great start to your dinner.

Union's fresh island creek oysters slide down easily. Try the tuna with eggplant and fennel, the trout with lentils and spinach, or share a lamb pizza – all unique and quite appetizing flavor combinations.

For me, the seasonal heirloom squash bisque was the "WOW" dish of the night. Save some of the sweet and cake-like restaurant-made cornbread for this extraordinary bowl of silky smooth bisque, and please hurry. The bisque goes off the menu soon and won't be back until the fall.

The name and the address are the same, and for many years 75 Chestnut was considered an upscale Beacon Hill establishment with a very upscale menu. Not too long ago a wall separating the bar from the dining room and the restaurant's price structure both came tumbling down. It is now an intimate and romantic neighborhood bar and restaurant featuring beautiful-

ly prepared food at very reasonable prices.

Every night is a special night, including chocolate night, jazz night, cookie night and more. For Valentine's Day, try the 75 Chestnut tower, a great starter that includes crispy fried calamari, hummus, tabouli, char-grilled lavash points and pumpkin raviolis. Beautiful to look at and light and delicious to eat, the salmon with ratatouille and polenta is definitely worthy of your attention.

So perfect for Valentine's Day, the chocolate trilogy dessert includes a small cup of chocolate soup, chocolate cream broulei and chocolate bread pudding. For a real chocolate high, top that off with a rich chocolate martini.

Nobody does it quite like the Ritz-Carlton Boston Common, where their award-winning pastry chefs from around the United States got together to redefine 13 favorite, classic desserts from English bread butter pudding to an all-American strawberry shortcake. The desserts feature a makeover of the classic tarte tatin, an "accidental" apple tart created back in 1898 when a chef mistakenly placed it in the oven

upside down.

At a recent dessert tasting in the Ritz-Carlton's newly renovated presidential suite, many of these desserts were waiting for us to sample. The cheesecake was smooth and silky. The bread pudding was light and buttery, and the carrot cake was better than carrot cake deserves to be. I enjoyed the champagne, but secretly longed for a tall glass of milk.

The Ritz-Carlton Boston Common is located on 10 Avery Street. A great place for Valentine's Day, visit the Jer-Ne Restaurant or the Gallery located in the hotel's lobby.



Ritz-Carlton's strawberry shortcake



75 Chestnut's salmon filet

For 15 years Sonsie, located at 327 Newbury Street in the Back Bay, has offered a creative menu including incredible baked stuffed oysters filled with a light bread stuffing with butter and sherry.

The restaurant is also famous for their exceptionally delicious vegetable spring rolls served with Vietnamese dipping sauce, lettuce wrap and fresh mint. The walnut-crusting shrimp, apple Waldorf salad with Bibb lettuce and honey Dijon vinaigrette is unequalled. The tender and succulent shrimp are covered in fine, almost powdered walnuts. This salad is truly a one-of-a-kind dish.

The ricotta-filled gnocchi is pan-toasted and served with a wild boar Bolognese with broccoli rabe on top. Colorful and delicious, this dish is a complete meal all by itself.

Once you've sampled desserts at Sonsie, you will forever yearn for the taste of their petit four – a hazelnut macaroon, a peanut butter cup, frozen chocolate mousse and fluff. After Valentine's Day, you'll be rushing back for the restaurant-made sorbets, including citrus, lemon, grapefruit and an unbelievably delicious tangelo sorbet served with candied limequats.

Happy Valentine's Day, and happy eating!



Sonsie's gnocchi

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