

SUSTAINABLE, SERENE AND SATIATING

The Farmhouse at Serenbe showcases local, organic ingredients



Scrumptious strawberry and kiwi tart



Crisp, flavorful greens are adorned with braised clams, Israeli couscous, pickled red onions, yellow beets and micro-thin slivers of watermelon radish.



Whole fried Bramlett Farms trout

PHOTOS/SPARK ST. JUDE

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Thirty-two miles may seem like a long way to go for dinner, but when we arrive at the Farmhouse at Serenbe, (the latter an amalgamation of “serenity” and “be”), we adopt a different perspective, one that’s not too concerned with time. Situated in Palmetto, southwest of Atlanta, the view of rolling pastures dotted with furry farm animals and bursting blooms is an amuse-bouche of calm. Its effect is immediate: By the time my husband parks the car, I’ve already forgotten the stresses of rush-hour traffic and looming deadlines.

We mosey up a wooden walkway flanked by hydrangeas sagging with the weight of their white and chartreuse flowers. A friendly hostess greets us as we enter the main house where the dining room is located. (It’s one of five buildings that comprise the Inn at Serenbe.) She confirms our reservations—I can’t recommend traveling this far without advance planning—and leads us to our table.

As with any restaurant, the table assignment can influence the quality of the overall dining experience. All seating options here seem to offer reasonable comfort, but I’m thrilled when we get a corner table next to a window overlooking the garden. I snag the cushioned bench seat along the back wall and Dean plops down into the wooden chair without complaint. The sunroom-style décor of this intimate space is pleasing but doesn’t compete with spring just beyond its windows.

Our server approaches and introduces herself. Typically, the next step of the dining rou-

tine is some version of the question, “Would you like a cocktail?” Not so here—at least, not yet, since the Farmhouse has no liquor license. Some may find that bothersome, but I welcome the opportunity to bring wine from home without a corkage fee. Walking in with a special bottle in hand feels like visiting a friend; it’s a shame the days of the BYOB policy may be numbered.

The evening’s menu is then recited—the only printed version is located on the chalkboard just inside the door. The menu changes daily and is brief: There’s a starter course, two meat entree options (a vegetarian option can be requested when making a reservation) and dessert. That’s it. Such simplicity aligns with Serenbe’s “farm to table” concept that is part and parcel of the community’s mission. (The development is comprised of EarthCraft homes, plenty of trails, livestock, a community garden, galleries and studios, retail, live-work spaces and a commitment to protecting the wetlands by preserving 70 percent of green space and utilizing sustainable practices.)

Picky eaters or anyone with a specific hankering are advised to check the Web site for the week’s menu before making a reservation. But diners willing to trust Chef Tony Seichrist to transform local, organic ingredients into a meal are in for a treat. The best news is the prix fixe prices: \$33 per person for three courses Thursday through Saturday and \$22 on Sunday.

As is our standard practice, Dean and I order different entrees and agree to share. We sit back and anticipate the meal.

First up is a salad. Crisp, flavorful greens are adorned with braised clams, Israeli couscous,

pickled red onions, yellow beets and micro-thin slivers of watermelon radish, all drizzled with roasted-tomato vinaigrette. It’s a fantastic combination of top-quality ingredients.

The venison is grilled to perfection. It’s juicy, tender and boasts a subtle game flavor. One bite and I immediately wish I’d ordered it. Watching Dean shove forkfuls into his mouth, I worry that I may not get a second taste.

My whole fried Bramlett Farms trout arrives with head and tail intact. Realizing that there’s nowhere for me to stash the remains if I perform the dissection myself, I ask the server to have both ends whacked off in the kitchen. The dish is promptly whisked away and returned. Truth is, I’m not a fan of freshwater fish. This trout *is* flaky, tender and tasty, but I quickly tire of angling my fork between delicate bones—so I con Dean into swapping plates. He smiles like a lottery winner at the exchange.

Both entrees are served with impeccable sides of barley, seared endive and broccolini. The meal also includes a basket of mini cornbread muffins served hot but without the assortment of Serenbe-brand jellies and honeys that I’d seen available for sale on the way into the restaurant.

During the scrumptious dessert, strawberry and kiwi tart, Chef Seichrist visits our table. Working here must be a dream job for a chef, I say. “Absolutely,” he grins. What’s the appeal? “I was a gardener before I started cooking,” he says, noting that Serenbe gives him the unique opportunity to work with local farmers and then create new preparations for and combinations of seasonal ingredients.

We leave sated and thoroughly relaxed. Somehow, the trip back to Atlanta seems shorter. **SP**

DINING ESSENTIALS

The Farmhouse at Serenbe

10950 Hutcheson Ferry Road
Palmetto 30268
770-463-2622
www.serenbefarmhouse.com

Hours: Dinner: Thu–Sat, 6–9 p.m.; Sun, Noon–5 p.m.

Reservations: Yes

Dress code: Dressy casual

Cuisine: Contemporary Southern

Alcohol: BYOB until the Farmhouse acquires a liquor license

Cost: Thu–Sat \$33 per person; Sun \$22 per person, not including beverages, tax and gratuity

Credit cards: MasterCard and Visa

Outdoor seating: Screened porch, weather permitting

Parking: No charge

The Serenbe Community celebrates Earth Day April 22–29, culminating with the Second Annual May Day event on April 29. For more information, visit www.serenbecommunity.com/home.html.