

Tuna and avocado



Tomato salad



LETTING

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Park 75 frees diners from making decisions with its Kitchen, Uncorked! program

DINING ESSENTIALS

PARK 75

Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta
75 14th St.
404-253-3840
www.fourseasons.com

HOURS: Breakfast: Mon.-Sat., 6:30-11:30 a.m. and Sun. 7-10:30 a.m., Lunch: Mon.-Sat., 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Dinner: Mon.-Sat., 5:30-10 p.m., Sun. brunch: 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

RESERVATIONS: Recommended

DRESS CODE: Business

ALCOHOL: Full bar

COST: Entrées at breakfast from \$10, lunch from \$16 and dinner from \$32

CREDIT CARDS: All major

PARKING: Valet

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

KITCHENINSIGHTS

Executive Chef Robert Gerstenecker must be psychic. How else to explain his uncanny ability to serve diners exactly what they'll love? Gerstenecker gets to show off his skills with Kitchen, Uncorked!, a new dining option at Park 75, which is located inside Midtown's Four Seasons Hotel. The program invites diners to leave all the decision-making to Chef Gerstenecker. Inform the server of any dietary restrictions and/or foods or preparations that you don't like, and then relax while seasonally inspired dishes are specially crafted just for you. The culinary adventure costs \$40 per person for a three-course meal with wine pairings—a remarkable bargain for an unforgettable fine dining experience.

No two dishes are alike since each one is created with a specific diner in mind, but all feature seasonal ingredients and offer the chef a unique opportunity to get creative. You don't know what you're going to get, and that element of surprise is part of the fun. Of course, there's also some risk—for example, if you forget to mention that you don't like something, it could end up on your plate. (In which case, allergies notwithstanding, I recommend you dig in anyway: In Gerstenecker's talented hands, you just

might discover that the thing you didn't think you like is actually pretty darn good.)

Ever-eager eaters, my husband and I opted to test out Kitchen, Uncorked!, and, at the same time, treat our niece from St. Cloud, Minn.—where Olive Garden is the fanciest restaurant in town—to her first fine dining experience. During her visit, Shannon proved to be an adventurous eater, especially for a 13-year-old, and was game to try this new concept, even if a bit skeptical about what she might be served.

I'd been to Park 75 before—it's one of my personal favorite Atlanta restaurants—so seeing it anew through the eyes of a first-time visitor was quite fun. Valet parking is something we Atlantans may take for granted, but it absolutely won Shannon over. Back home, she likely mourns each time she must open her own car door. Park 75 is on the second floor of the hotel, up a sweeping double staircase (or an elevator). Getting there requires walking through a grand lobby richly decorated with rose-hued marble, bold columns and golden accents. The space is impressive, elegant and inviting.

Once comfortably seated at our cozy table, we defined our dining parameters: none of us were interested in foie gras or raw meats. Shannon also didn't want

mushrooms, uncooked tomatoes or hot spices. We sat back in anticipation.

First up were generous pours of chardonnay for Dean and viognier for me. More wines accompanied each course, always ideally suited to the dishes. Shannon was presented two mock-

tails: the first was made with frozen raspberries, peach puree, simple syrup and Sprite served in a frozen martini glass; the second combined lychee puree, coconut milk, grenadine and Sprite in a chilled champagne flute.



Chef Robert Gerstenecker

PHOTOS/COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

First courses consisted of either a soup of corn, lobster and black-eyed peas or a tempura flash-fried squash blossom stuffed with goat cheese served atop garden greens with grilled peaches and pickled grapes. Both were fantastic.

My main course was Dover sole atop scrumptious gnocchi, crab and heirloom tomatoes. Dean's tender lamb tenderloin was roasted to perfection. Shannon got flaky white salmon with sautéed squash and sweet peppers. We sampled each other's dishes and, though all were delicious, were most pleased with what we'd been served. How does Gerstenecker match food to people so well? "It's something you get a sense for," he says of the skill picked up over 16 years working for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, with stints in New York, Palm Beach, Toronto and Hong Kong, among other places.

Desserts also perfectly tickled taste buds: I loved my banana crunch, Dean devoured his peach tart, and Shannon rated her trio of passion fruit, vanilla and chocolate versions of crème brûlée as "to die for."

Satisfied and so stuffed that finishing our coffee and Shannon's silky-smooth hot chocolate proved a challenge, we accepted Gerstenecker's invitation to tour his rooftop terrace garden. There, he grows herbs, tomatoes and peppers for the restaurant, and keeps a beehive. "I can't wait to taste 'Midtown Honey,'" he says. Nor can we. **SP**