

dining HOPE PHILBRICK

Tasty food at reasonable prices could make Feast a great restaurant — if it drops the haughty attitude.

Scrumptious Feast

A COOL SATURDAY EVENING produced a cold reception at Feast Restaurant in Decatur if you admit you don't have a reservation. Calling ahead apparently means the difference between treatment as a welcome guest or a nuisance; it may also help avoid nearly an hour's wait for a table.

Not waiting, however, would be a darn shame. The mood warms dramatically once inside.

If the wait seems long, adding more tables clearly isn't the solution. The place is packed with a mix of gay and straight folks seated in large groups. Maneuvering to the bar, I can't squeeze between tables along the path first chosen. I back out and take another route.

The bartender quickly offers menus. I point out that the counter is sprinkled with crumbs, and they're whisked away.

Influenced by Mediterranean cuisine, the eclectic menu offers meat, seafood and vegetarian options in several categories. Descriptions are straightforward and tempting. Two-level pricing provides for small or large portions in many cases.

The wood-fire oven is loaded with planked salmon and various pizzas. The kitchen is busy, but beer and appetizers arrive shortly.

CRIMINI, PORTOBELLO AND SHITAKE mushroom "chips" with creamy gorgonzola sauce (\$6) are potentially addictive. Fried in a delicate batter, they're not greasy and retain appropriate texture.

Wild mushroom, gorgonzola, walnut and rosemary pizza (\$10) is a yummy combination atop a just-right crust. Cut into four slices, the pie is easily shared as an appetizer or work as an entrée for one.

After 40 minutes, I inquire about the wait. At least another 20 minutes passes. I notice an empty table for four. It fills in minutes. Guess they had a reservation.

Laughter bounces off the brick walls. A group leaves; tables are rearranged. Seated, at last.

The server arrives immediately to describe the specials and suggest wine. Organized by price, the wine list features 20 bottles under \$20, 20 over \$20, 12 at \$5.50 a glass, plus half-bottles, sparklers and sangria. There's a decent mix of whites and reds from various regions.

Having had plenty of time to review the menu, orders are placed. Tasty bread and olive oil arrive first.

The Caesar salad (\$5) is sour and overwhelmed by lemon. It's the night's only culinary disappointment.

Wild mushroom and spinach risotto with shaved Parmesan (\$10) is heavenly. The rice is perfectly al dente and the earthy flavors are comforting.

Grilled Angus rib eye with chimichurri is accompanied by sautéed spinach and



The interior of Feast Restaurant is warm and inviting, even if the service sometimes isn't.

herb-roasted potato (\$18). The steak is a juicy medium as ordered, the spinach retains a bite and the potatoes are crispy on the outside and tender on the inside.

Desserts are \$6 each or \$15 for a sampler platter of any four. The carrot cake with walnut cream cheese icing is dense and sweet. But the whipped cream and strawberry garnish is out of place.

TABLES ARE SO CLOSE THAT I CAN'T help overhearing neighboring conversations. The woman on my left cannot ignore a craving and asks if the mixed green salad can be topped with grilled chicken, even if it's not on the menu. Yes, but the server warns that all chicken breasts are on the bone. I think a chef with a knife might easily solve that problem, but her chicken arrives with bone intact, missing this opportunity for superior service.

Meanwhile, the wrong order is delivered to the table on my right. It's removed as the server explains it's meant for table 34 not 24. Within minutes, the correct plates arrive. An issue of a missing knife is quickly resolved.

Open since July, Feast already has a following, likely drawn by its fresh, well-prepared food, satisfying portions and reasonable prices. But service and attitude missteps stand in the way of this becoming the great restaurant it has the potential to be.

i FOOD FILE



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Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★
Comfort and Aesthetics: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Scene: ★★★★★