



Serenbe supreme pizza

HOME SWEET HOME

The draw of the Hil on the Hill: A Restaurant at Serenbe



Cookies and cream dessert

PHOTOS/SPARK ST. JUDE

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

One of the first questions a Realtor asked me when I began looking for a home in Atlanta was, “What’s your favorite restaurant?” Her suggestion was that I buy a place within walking distance of it. The idea seemed absurd, and not only because I’d been in Atlanta for less than a week. How could I ever commit to just one restaurant?

Ten years have passed, but I recently recalled this advice while driving 32 miles south of downtown Atlanta to check out the Hil, the third restaurant to open in the Community at Serenbe. Current residents of Serenbe’s three live/work/play neighborhoods had likely purchased their homes without even knowing that this specific restaurant would open. Surely they’d welcome a third

dining option in addition to the Farmhouse and the Blue Eyed Daisy Bakeshop, good as those both are.

Although the idea that anyone would eat a meal here and decide to buy a house seems silly, it was always a safe bet to assume that Serenbe would have only good restaurants. Marie and Steve Nygren founded the community nestled into the 900-acre Chattahoochee Hill countryside and both have food backgrounds: Steve launched the Peasant restaurant group in Atlanta; Marie is the daughter of Margaret Lupo, owner and chef of Mary Mac’s Tea Room.

The Hil is owned and operated by Chef Hilary White, who worked previously at 103 West and was the first female chef hired by Pano Karatassos for the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group. The Hil is a family affair: Hilary’s husband Jim White is general manager and her mom Sandy Pitsch serves as dining room manager. The warm atmosphere is already winning fans.

On the Saturday evening I visit, the place is crowded: A small wedding reception fills two long tables at one end of the main dining room, and a birthday party surrounds a round table at the other. Presumably strangers, perhaps neighbors, these folks toast one another with an enthusiasm that energizes the room.

Chef Hilary’s menu features produce from Serenbe Organic Farm, which is located around the corner from the restaurant. Reading through the appetizer, pizza, entrée and dessert options, the commitment to regional, seasonal ingredients is clear.

Each dish offers balanced flavors: Individual ingredients are showcased, while also enhancing the total combination. For example, lemon vinaigrette adds a tangy note to the salad of Serenbe Farm roasted beets, bitter greens and Sweet Grass Dairy Farm goat cheese. Caramelized shallots introduce sweetness to the earthy wild mushroom pizza topped with

creamy Fontina cheese, all of which sit atop a hand-tossed wheat crust blackened just enough for a moderately smoky flavor. A blend of black and green olives gives the sweet supreme pizza with fennel sausage and onions a salty edge.

Whether from land or sea, meats are cooked to perfection. The large chunks of chicken in Hilary’s all-natural chicken pot pie are fork tender. Juicy filet mignon is topped with crispy fried Blue Point oysters and a light Béarnaise sauce. Maine sea scallops are sautéed until firm yet moist, then presented atop smoked Bohemian sausage, cubes of butternut squash and dots of braised greens. I can’t name a favorite among them.

The cake du jour turns out to be chocolate topped with Chantilly cream and an orange caramel sauce. Flaky and yummy, it’s rivaled by the warm dark chocolate pudding topped with a scoop of black pepper yogurt and raspberry sauce. The black pepper note is slightly odd, but it worked.

If the Hil were within walking distance, I’d likely dine there often. But the old real-estate maxim “location, location, location” seems to suggest that choosing a home requires careful consideration of various factors such as distance to work, proximity to loved ones and accessibility to conveniences like stores and restaurants. When all other factors align, a restaurant like the Hil may persuade some folks to move to Serenbe. At the very least, it may help endear the community to its residents. Moving isn’t an option for me, but I’m thankful that visiting is an easy drive from Atlanta. **SP**

MAIN COURSE

DINING ESSENTIALS

The Hil on the Hill: A Restaurant at Serenbe

9110 Selborne Lane
Palmetto, GA 30268
770-463-6040
www.the-hil.com

Hours: Dinner: Wed.–Sun., 5–9 p.m.
Brunch: Sat. and Sun., 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

Reservations: Yes

Dress Code: Casual

Cuisine: Classic American with French influences; features farm-fresh and organic foods

Alcohol: Full bar

Cost: Entrées \$10-\$32

Credit Cards: All major

Outdoor Seating: Patio

Parking: Street



The Hil on the Hill

Chef Hilary White