

SUMPTUOUS SHOWCASE

Discovering the rich flavors of Argentina at Prime Meridian



Malbec-braised beef short ribs with an oven-dried tomato chimichurri sauce

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

In a global company, it can be difficult to build camaraderie among peers. Omni Hotels has found a way to bring its worldwide team of executive chefs and food and beverage professionals together on an annual basis with its Flavors of the World program, currently in its fifth year. Each spring, the Omni folks work together to design a special fall menu showcasing a specific cuisine. The program increases participants' knowledge of world cuisine, fosters teambuilding and provides a forum to get creative in the kitchen.

From a strictly human resources perspective, it's a great program. But the good news is that the benefits don't stop there: Restaurant guests can enjoy a jazzed-up dinner menu with expanded options and new flavors. "The Sumptuous Flavors of Argentina" promotion kicked off this Nov. 1 and runs through Jan. 31, 2008. (Past years have featured the cuisines of Spain, Italy, Chile and the United States).

When the new menu first became available, I headed to Prime Meridian in the Omni Hotel at CNN Center to check it out. Parking in the South Tower was a

snap—after learning from an attendant at the North Tower that we were in the wrong place. A valet explained that parking would be complimentary as long as the ticket he'd just handed my husband was validated at the restaurant. We headed up to the lobby level and walked through a crowded bar into the sparsely populated dining room—which came as a surprise since, when making

reservations on Opentable.com, an earlier seating time wasn't available. Throughout the evening, the restaurant never filled up. In fact, as we walked out after finishing our meal, we noticed our server Ana leaving as well. If staffing in the dining room is an issue, we never noticed. Ana was attentive and backed up by two guys who helped clear dishes.

The Argentinean menus were tucked inside the standard menus—beyond that, you probably wouldn't know the promotion was taking place. No tango music playing or dancers swaying, no art on display and no pitch from the server. The food menu features a soup, one salad and an appetizer, three entrées and two desserts. Rather than agonize over what to choose, we ordered one of everything—which worked out to be a satisfying multicourse meal for two with sufficient leftovers for lunch the next day, at a cost of \$115 excluding tax and

gratuity (individual items are less than \$10, except entrées, which start at \$22). There's also a special Argentinean wine menu that boasts five reds, five whites and two dessert wines priced from \$5 per glass and from \$20 per bottle.

Overall, the dishes feature familiar ingredients like shrimp, corn, beef, squash, tomato and chorizo. That, plus the fact that the spice heat level is mild, opens up the possibility that the menu may appeal to a broad audience. If you prefer zesty flavors, don't worry: I typically opt for hot, but still enjoyed these complex, balanced flavor layers of sweetness and mild spice.

As for temperature heat, most of the dishes were served lukewarm. I suspect that they sometimes sat waiting before being delivered, because each time we finished a course our server would ask if we were ready for the next one. It would then arrive within moments—too fast to have been whipped up fresh from scratch.

Despite this misstep, the meal had many highlights. Andean-style shrimp and sweet corn chowder had a delicate broth that pleasantly melded savory and sweet flavors. The arugula salad with caramelized squash, regianito cheese shavings and honey vinaigrette could have passed as a dessert. The empanadas were filled with chunks of beef and potato and flavored with a robust garlic

DINING ESSENTIALS

Prime Meridian
Omni Hotel at CNN Center
100 CNN Center
404-818-4450
www.omnprimemeridian.com

Hours: Breakfast: Mon.–Sun. 6:30–11 a.m.
Lunch: Mon.–Sun. 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.
Dinner: Mon.–Sun. 5–10:30 p.m.

Reservations: Yes; also accepts walk-ins

Dress Code: Casual elegant

Cuisine: Continental American

Alcohol: Full bar

Smoking: No

Cost: Entrées \$16 to \$30

Credit Cards: American Express, MasterCard, Visa, Discover, Carte Blanche, Diners Club

Outdoor Seating: No

Parking: Valet



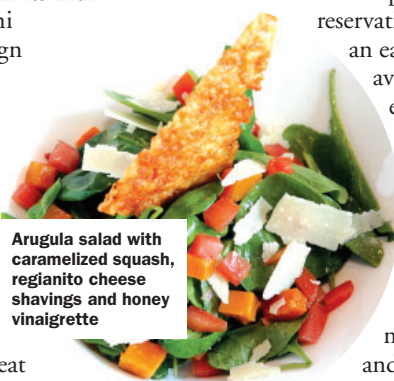
Dulce de leche crepes with strawberries in vanilla syrup and Chantilly cream

PHOTOS/SPARK ST. JUDE

mojo. Among the three entrées, our favorite was the malbec-braised beef short ribs that were melt-in-your-mouth tender. That's not to say that the grilled rib-eye topped with criolla sauce or the grilled Patagonian salmon with corn stew weren't yummy—they were—but the ribs were served with an oven-dried tomato chimichurri sauce that won over our taste buds most. Bread pudding spiked with dulce de leche and topped with caramelized bananas and vanilla ice cream was tasty, but the dulce de leche crepes with strawberries in vanilla syrup and Chantilly cream were an even better finale.

The Argentinean menu at Prime Meridian helped satisfy my curiosity about the country's cuisine and also fueled my desire to travel there. **SP**

MAIN COURSE



Arugula salad with caramelized squash, regianito cheese shavings and honey vinaigrette