

TITANIC TASTINGS

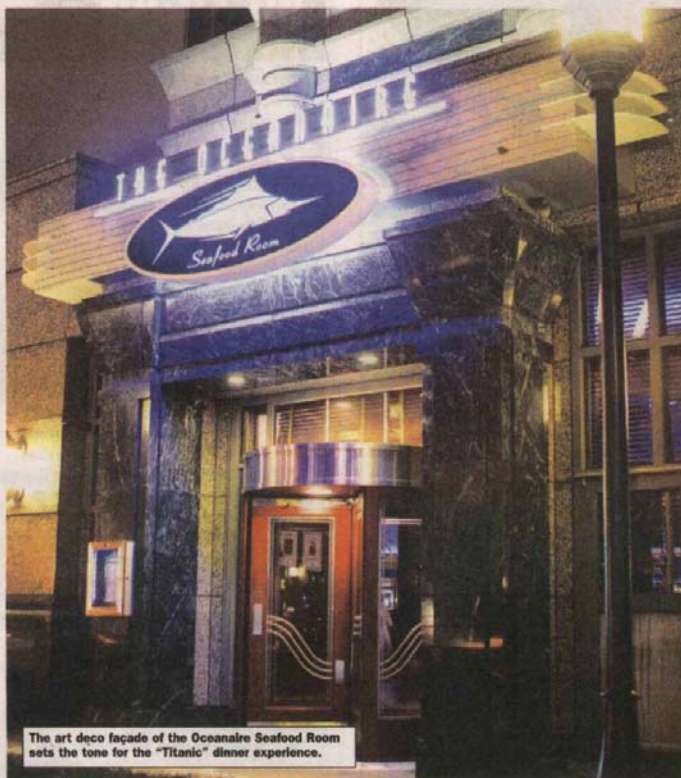
A delicious history lesson at the Oceanaire Seafood Room



The Waldorf bread pudding



Filet mignon and potato pillows encased in hash browns



The art deco facade of the Oceanaire Seafood Room sets the tone for the "Titanic" dinner experience.



Barley soup with pieces of mushroom, caramelized onion and al dente pearls of barley



Poached salmon with mousseline sauce, greens, flash-fried parsnips and blood orange segments

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

"Seize the moment. Remember all those women on the Titanic who waved off the dessert cart."—Erma Bombeck

Arriving at the Oceanaire Seafood Room on a recent Sunday evening, my husband and I discover that we aren't the only ones who have been anticipating this meal. "I've been looking forward to this," says Aaron Hutchinson, general manager and operating partner—and he seems almost giddy. Our server Daniel is equally excited. Turns out that we're the first to try the "Tastings from the Titanic First Class Menu," a special five-course meal offered in conjunction with the six-month limited engagement of "Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition" at the Atlanta Civic Center.

It might seem morbid to recreate the last first-class dinner served aboard the Titanic, but replicating the menu can be viewed as a way to honor the more than 1,500 lives lost. Also "it's about nostalgia for the era," says Hutchinson. For chefs, it's a culinary challenge. And for curious foodies, it's a unique educational opportunity, especially when preceded by a tour of the exhibit.

The Oceanaire is an ideal setting for this event since the dining room décor recalls a classic ocean liner. Art deco fixtures cast warm light on dark wood floors and curved walls. C-shaped booths wrapped in burgundy leather accented with brass tacks create private nooks within the large room. Tables are dressed with

white linen and, for the Titanic dinner, boast 10-piece place settings. Big-band music plays in the background. Attentive servers are dressed in white jackets and long white aprons.

On the evening of April 14, 1912, the first-class passengers aboard the Titanic were served an extravagant 10-course feast. "One challenge for us was the seasonality of ingredients," says Hutchinson. This is a factor in why he and Adam Newton, executive chef and operating partner, selected just five courses. But don't worry—you won't go home hungry.

As with all meals at the Oceanaire, the first arrivals are a complimentary relish tray—featuring pickled herring, raw vegetables, pickles and olives—and a warm half-loaf of sourdough bread. Although we know what lies ahead, we can't resist these tasty treats.

After discussing our wine preferences, Daniel recommends a glass of champagne

followed by a cabernet; they prove to be perfect pairings. Up first is oysters à la Russe. An oyster served raw on the half shell is doused with vodka sauce. No matter where you fall in the debate over whether or not a raw oyster should be chewed before swallowing, this preparation satisfies.

The barley soup has a rich and savory consommé base with pieces of mushroom, caramelized onion and al dente pearls of barley. After one spoonful, Dean proclaims it "wonderful."

When Sous Chef Chris Murphy delivers the third course, he explains that the mousseline sauce atop the poached salmon is essentially a whipped hollandaise. He adds that the recipe has been updated with the addition of greens, flash-fried parsnips and blood orange segments. The combination of blood orange and salmon is sensational; fans of James Cameron's award-

DINING ESSENTIALS

THE OCEANAIRE SEAFOOD ROOM
1100 Peachtree St. NW
Atlanta, 30309
404-475-BASS (2277)
www.theoceanaire.com/atlanta

Hours: Lunch, Mon-Fri 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Dinner, Sun-Thu 5-10 p.m., Fri and Sat 5-11 p.m.

Reservations: Yes; required for the Titanic menu

Dress code: Casual
Cuisine: Contemporary American, seafood and steakhouse

Alcohol: Full bar

Smoking: No

Cost: Entrees from \$20; Titanic menu \$75 per person

Credit cards: All major

Outdoor seating: No

Parking: Valet

winning "Titanic" movie might compare it to the onscreen chemistry between Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

The fourth course, or entree, features filet mignon tender enough to cut with a fork. Potato pillows, served alongside, are a yummy duo of mashed potatoes encased in hash browns. Black truffle-butter adds an earthy, rich note to the dish while a reduction sauce lends a sweet edge.

When I think I can't eat another bite, dessert arrives. The Waldorf bread pudding and French vanilla ice cream with a caramel crème sauce impresses as much as each preceding course.

It's a delicious history lesson. **SP**

Tastings from the Titanic First-Class Menu will be available at the Oceanaire Seafood Room through June 3, 2007; advance reservations required.

