

Point of View

Perspective is Everything at These High-Rise Restaurants

by Charmaine Cooper Hussain

Look around — where you're dining is as important as what's on your plate. If you've got lofty aspirations about your dining experience here, you won't be disappointed — just dress your best and make your way to the top.

CHAPARRAL CLUB

Back in the day, the Chaparral Club was for members only; Dallas's movers and shakers — oilmen, mostly — rolled out the barrels on the 38th floor of the Southland Center. Now it's the Adam's Mark Hotel, and now the views may be startlingly different. But the very special caché that this restaurant has always had remains intact.

The atmosphere is a bit formal, with tuxedoed servers and a live, maraca-shaking jazz combo. The tables along the windows are highly coveted, as they should be, but regardless of where you're seated, the views to the north (mostly smaller buildings in Uptown, Park Cities, and beyond these, towers along I-635) and to the south (skyscraper upon skyscraper, the southern tip of downtown) are wide and even tranquil, particularly when the sun sets.

Kelly Johnson is the new kid in the penthouse. Under the guidance of executive chef Uwe Rudnick, Johnson's new menu shakes things up a bit — this guy has a way with vinaigrettes. For example, vine-ripened red and yellow tomatoes were stacked atop a pool of chocolate-colored balsamic vinaigrette and chive oil, which worked well as platemates.

Chilean sea bass soup was enlivened by a saffron-champagne broth, clear and lemony, with a crunch courtesy of coarsely chopped fennel. The shallow bowl, filled only partially, was reminiscent of Vietnamese pho.

After a palate-clearing mango sorbet, as

Chaparral Club is a top spot for a special occasions.



sweet as a snocone, entrées arrived, as tall as the building in which we were dining. A rack of Colorado lamb sprouted a thriving garden of thyme and rosemary sprigs, although it was the flavors of mint and mustard, sweet and tangy, that enhanced the tender and flavorful meat. The New York strip was made all the better by a bacon-balsamic jus.

Chaparral Club's conclusions were breathtaking in their presentations. Mango and raspberry purées, along with a vanilla cream, radiated like peacock feathers from two ramekins of vanilla and chocolate crème brûlée. The former was bland, but the latter was sugary, like frost-

ing. And the chocolate lava cake — the best chocolate cake I've tried in all of the metroplex — erupts its gooey contents when plied gently with a fork.

NANA GRILL

I had not expected a view overlooking Interstate 35 to be so charming. And I had not expected the menu to be so — how shall I say — luxurious. Nana Grill isn't, and will never be, a dive, but my impressions soared to new heights on the 27th floor of the Wyndham Anatole Hotel.

A colleague of mine insists that the interior is in dire need of an update, but with a view that went beyond the World Trade

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cream sauce was creative and coy — look beyond its congealed gray gravy appearance.

A cheese course of parmesan-reggiano wedges followed, served on a green marble plate with an excellent banana-tamarind chutney that helped alleviate the husky cheese. And between white chocolate crème brûlée, chocolate brioche bread pudding, and a cappuccino terrine, the bread pudding rose above, warm and brownie-like, with a chocolate flavor that was far from overwhelming — just the way I like it.

ANTARES

Antares is named for the 15th brightest star in the sky, a star so similar to Mars that its name derives from “Anti-Ares” (another name

speed can be — and is — adjusted by Antares’s staff. Just don’t ask to be let off.

Chef de Cuisine Cheryl Scantlebury prepares New American fare with a down-to-earth flair. One appetizer that was far from down-to-earth, however, was sautéed cilantro shrimp, served in a martini glass-shaped bowl with three towering corn husks, which stuck out like a headdress. The shrimp, nicely flavored, were served with a roasted corn relish and mixed greens for crunch. A slightly warm remoulade was appropriately spicy.

Between the soup — a chef’s daily creation, in this case a Wisconsin potato cheese — and the seasonal field greens salad, I preferred the salad, with its almost pale yellow orange sections and crunchy candied pecans. Green apples were a

Rooms with a view: Nana Grill (above) and Antares (below)

Center toward downtown, I hardly noticed. At Chaparral Club, we were dining in the clouds, but from this shorter perch you can monitor traffic and the ant-like comings and goings of hotel guests. A trio of violinists strolled about, and yes, they will ask if there’s anything in particular you’d like to hear, so be prepared.

Doug Brown — who at the ripe old age of 26 has already cooked at New York’s James Beard House — reinvents his menu every evening. He also offers an ever-changing, nine-course chef’s tasting menu, which borrows heavily from the “regular” appetizers but is an exceptional value (\$75, or \$100 with accompanying wines). The tasting menu on our chosen night included caviar, a singular but colossal blue prawn, and shark — my companion joked that she was eating her way up the food chain.

Chilled Japanese Ahi tuna and Maine lobster — with a coconut aioli, petite herb salad, lychees, and vanilla-orange oil — was a delicate dish that startled with its millions upon millions of tiny vanilla beans. The inventive flavor combination was alternately curious and ultimately bizarre, as if dessert had accidentally collided with my appetizer. All was forgiven, however, over mixed greens with taleggio-truffle dressing, creamy and intriguing, especially with the addition of cherries.

A sweetbread and wild mushroom cake was earthy, masculine, and smoky, served with an outstanding leek jus. Foie gras — one of the chef’s favorite foods — was the epitome of high style, buttery smooth with a hint of cracked black pepper.

Our entrées were a sight to behold. A grilled lamb chop was served with an inventive and delicious orangy beet-potato purée, as well as gnocchi stuffed with goat cheese and asparagus spears. Crab-crust halibut was remarkable simply for the fact that the crab coating adhered so well; the accompanying morel



for Mars). How fitting then that Antares, a revolving restaurant, is located within the planet-shaped Reunion Tower, or as most locals refer to it, the Reunion Ball.

Owned by the Hyatt Regency Dallas, which is undergoing extensive renovations, finding the elevator to Antares required some round-about routes. And talk about “going up” — a glass wall offers a dizzying perspective as it climbs 50 stories high.

Once seated in the outer, revolving ring, my companion kept making wisecracks about the stationary ledge — you can’t rest your elbow on it, and you can’t place your purse or phone on it, lest you have to backtrack a few degrees to retrieve it. But the panoramic view was nothing to joke about. Its expanse is simply unparalleled, and the north/south/east/west signs on the windows were helpful in establishing orientation. It takes about an hour and five minutes to make a complete revolution, but the

nice counterbalance to strong blue cheese.

Of the entrées, Scantlebury has a few favorites: chargrilled muscovy duck breast and duck sausage with molé has “been a huge hit” since it debuted a few months ago; Shiner Bock-marinated buffalo easily holds its own against any steak, cooked to perfection and served with a comforting spoonbread; and pan-roasted red snapper is a wharf’s worth, with mussels, scallops, clams, and shrimp in a fennel-herb broth.

If you commit to dessert, be prepared for tremendous portions. Echoing the height-heavy presentation common to all three restaurants, even a deep-dish apple crisp had cinnamon ice cream piled up high.

I can think of few reasons not to make the vertical journey (excusing acrophobics) to each of these restaurants. Perhaps it is the sheer height of the locale that inspires each chef to rise above the norm. **LZ**