

III Forks gets to meat of the matter

By Dale Rice

Thursday, January 18, 2007

The ambience is elegant, the meat is marvelous and you certainly won't leave hungry.

But like a prized set of silver headed for the dining table, III Forks still needs a bit of polishing.

The upscale restaurant, based in Dallas with another location in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., soon to open, is one of the latest additions to the area around the Second Street entertainment district.

III Forks has the glitz: Some rooms have an old-fashioned New York steak house feel, with an abundance of dark wood and marble. Others are distinctly different, including one with upholstered walls and another filled with portraits of Texas governors.

On a recent Friday, the place was bustling with well-dressed patrons (not a single member of Austin's jeans-and-T-shirt crowd was spotted).

They were spending heavily for meals that were stellar in many aspects.

First, the prime beef was exquisite. In less than three months, III Forks has established itself right behind Ruth's Chris as a top spot for steaks. The bone-in rib-eye (\$36.95) and the New York strip (\$36.95) were juicy, well-seasoned, tender and cooked a perfect medium-rare.

The Dover sole (\$32.95) was lovely, an indication that main-course fish gets the same attention as a steak.

Unlike other major steak houses in Austin, sides are complimentary with the entrees at III Forks and include potato, vegetable (snap peas on this night), creamed corn, sliced tomatoes and green onions.

The restaurant's service aspires to be first-class. At each course, waiters deliver all the table's plates at the same time. After the entrees, even more staffers follow with separate dishes of gravy, creamed corn, sliced tomatoes and green onions to be served individually on request.

Desserts, made in-house, were appealing, including a moist, multilayer chocolate cake (\$7.95) and a New Orleans-style bread pudding (\$7.95).

Despite so much being done well at III Forks, there were rough spots that needed burnishing.

The scallops wrapped in bacon (\$12.95), an appetizer, were overcooked and beginning to toughen. The tasty croustades (\$9.95), open-faced beef tenderloin sandwiches drizzled with mustard, seemed more at home at a reception than as the introduction to a first-class establishment.

The tomatoes, although bright red and beautiful, were tasteless. What's the point of serving lousy, out-of-season tomatoes?

The steak was automatically paired with mashed potatoes and the sole was partnered with a baked potato. Why not ask diners which they'd prefer rather than make assumptions?

In a restaurant full of attentive staffers, water glasses should not be allowed to sit empty for several minutes.

And finally, the kitchen needs work on its timing. Our main course arrived before the appetizer was cleared and, in the ensuing confusion, our dirty silver was not replaced with the entree. Then it took more than 25 minutes after ordering for dessert to appear.

Those missteps were not enough to kill our enthusiasm for the meal. III Forks still left a good taste, although it has the potential — with a little work — to be even better.

drice@statesman.com; 445-3859

Find this article at:

http://www.austin360.com/dining/content/food_drink/restaurants/stories/xl/2007/01/18dine.html

