

Review | Gulfstream crowd galloping to III Forks

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CHARLES TRAINOR JR. / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Chef Tommy Nevill presents III Forks' Tomahawk rib-eye.

The dust has mostly settled. Business is underway at gleaming new stores like Crate & Barrel, Pottery Barn and West Elm. And more than half the 20 restaurants and clubs coming to The Village at Gulfstream Park Racing & Casino in Hallandale Beach have opened.

Judging by Saturday night, albeit the last night of the racing season, an early favorite is the elegant steakhouse III Forks. A well-heeled crowd packed the 350-seat restaurant, the seventh location for a Texas-based chain that also owns Cantina Laredo, III Forks' next-door neighbor at

Gulfstream.

III Forks has a sophisticated setting, with dark woods, vaulted ceilings and glass-enclosed wine rooms showcasing 1,500 bottles, from a \$28 Chateau St. Michelle reisling to a \$1,900 Screaming Eagle cabernet. There's an on-site sommelier as well as a pastry chef.

The sprawling space, which opened Feb. 11, is divided into five dining rooms, a patio and bar. The coziest might be the Legends Room, with beaded chandeliers and black-and-white photos of icons like President Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra.

The limited menu of starters sticks to basics like shrimp cocktail, French onion soup and wedge salad. A little more innovation would be welcome but everything is made in-house and most dishes are bound to be crowd pleasers.

Our friendly server started us off with a terrific III Forks salad -- a summery mix of Granny Smith apple slices, toasted pecans, blue cheese and field greens in a light maple walnut vinaigrette. The kitchen even split it for us.

The seafood medley features three rich items from the appetizer list -- a delicious two-ounce crab cake, bacon-wrapped diver scallop meunière and two chilled shrimp with a zesty cocktail sauce -- that's fine for two.

Steaks star, with a choice of eight to 10 cuts. Our favorite is the 18-ounce, bone-in rib-eye, perfectly cooked medium-rare with a warm, rosy center, phenomenal charred crust and flavorful marbling.

Specials on our visit included an \$89.99, 36-ounce ``Tomahawk" long-bone rib-eye and a \$69.99, 16-ounce Wagyu New York strip. The prized beef is certainly juicy and buttery tender, but I can't say that it's worth \$40 more than our excellent rib-eye. (Most steaks are butchered in-house so you can get the size and cut you want.)

There are a half-dozen seafood choices, including an Australian lobster tail, Atlantic salmon, shrimp platter and Chilean sea bass. The fresh catch was glistening grilled grouper, a moist and juicy plank of fish served with a slightly sweet coconut beurre blanc sauce. (If you're here for lunch, Forks makes a wonderful blackened fish sandwich -- whatever's the fresh catch -- with fries for \$14.95.)

There's also roasted chicken, rack of lamb and prime rib. Most entrees are a la carte, so you'll want to share a side or two. There's asparagus with sliced toasted almonds, creamed corn and button mushrooms in a potent Maker's Mark sauce. Six Cheese Potatoes is too much of a good thing -- sliced Idaho potatoes topped with a bechamel sauce plus asiago, provolone, Cheddar, Parmesan, mozzarella and Monterey Jack.

Desserts are also over-the-top, like the gigantic six-layer chocolate ganache cake with ultra rich icing and toasted coconut. Even better: heavenly bread pudding -- challah in a decadent bourbon-pecan-caramel sauce, served with house-made cinnamon ice cream and strawberries.

Odds are Ill Forks will help The Village become a destination even if the ponies aren't running.

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