

Sterling Server

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Of all the things to like about Burton's Grill - and there are plenty, from the smart, sophisticated décor to the killer Key lime pie - the most likable had to be Nathan, our server.

We weren't an easy party to love, several picky eaters and a messy toddler. But Nathan did his best to accommodate us, whether it was brewing a fresh pot of coffee on our behalf or bringing a plate of sliced lemons to my sister, who had requested lots of lemon with her ice water. When we asked for some crayons to keep my daughter happy, he promised to see what he could rustle up, then apologized profusely when he returned empty-handed.

With Nathan's good-natured service, there was no way we wouldn't love Burton's Grill. But the new, "upscale casual" place at Evergreen Walk has lots of other things going for it. The restaurant, which opened in May, is the sole Connecticut link in a small, Massachusetts-based chain.

Inside, it's all dark wood, with touches of cream and taupe. The contemporary feel is reinforced by the two giant flat-screen TVs on either side of the bar.

The menu, while far from daring, shows flashes of flair. The grilled stuffed zucchini (\$7), for instance, was a tasty appetizer featuring nicely charred zucchini stuffed with herbed cheese and blanketed in tomato sauce.

Gazpacho featured black beans, cilantro and a dollop of sour cream in a tangy tomatoey broth. Not traditional, but it worked.

Caesar salad (\$8), crisp romaine covered in an eggy dressing that carried the slightly salty tang of anchovy paste, got top scores at our table. A summer risotto special, with corn, sugar snaps, Serrano ham, shallots and basil, was also promptly devoured. And this is a place that knows how to do french fries. Golden brown and dusted with just the right amount of salt and pepper, they are a wonder.

So what's not to like about Burton's Grill? The Reuben, a thick slab of a sandwich with corned beef, sauerkraut, bland Swiss cheese and Russian dressing on grilled marble, was OK, but for \$12, we expected more.

Which brings us to the prices. While not unreasonable, given the quality of the ingredients, this place is a bit steep, especially given its shopping mall location. Sandwiches and burgers range from \$10 to \$12; entrees are significantly higher. The New York strip steak carries a \$29 price tag, which is not much less than you'd expect to pay at a first-rate steakhouse.

All was forgiven by the time dessert arrived. The hot fudge sundae (\$6), with its cap of whipped cream and nuggets of chopped Health bar, was good. But the true star was the Key lime pie. Cradled in a crust of granola and toasted almonds were two tangy layers of citrusy custard, each lighter than air. At \$7, some might view it as decadent, but we would have gladly paid double for.

Well, that and Nathan, our server.

- Daniela Altimari
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