

Foodie Freak: Great new offerings at the Blue Wing

Contributed by Ross A. Christensen
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My wife thinks that I am a living version of Inspector Javert from the classic story of Les Miserables. I see everything very black or white, right or wrong, Rapala or live bait; and due to this strict code I could never be a police officer, because I feel the law enforcement system is fundamentally flawed and not up to the standards of what I think it should be. I respect all officers that put their lives down every day for each of us, and I personally thank them every time I see them; it's just that the system they work under has problems.

This dogmatic belief system has kept me from eating at the Blue Wing in Upper Lake for over a year now. I know what you are thinking: "Uff Da, Ross! What could cause you to develop such strong feelings over such a great restaurant?"

A couple of years ago I went with my family to The Blue Wing. We went several times and each time I was dissatisfied with the meal I received (although to be fair, my wife and daughter loved their meals). I eventually wrote them an e-mail with my complaints. I mentioned how the "snapper" dish was actually made with tilapia, and the salmon wasn't marinated as stated, only glazed.

I went on to explain how I knew these things, and that I wasn't just some quack hoping for some compensation. They never responded to my complaints in any way which would most likely have doused my fire quickly, so I mentally wrote them off and wouldn't return. Like I said, black or white.

Skip ahead a few months, and the Blue Wing hires a new management staff. My inner Inspector Javert did not waver (fans of Les Miserables will be thinking right now, "Y–know, things didn't end well for Javert"). Friends and colleagues would tell me how much they love The Blue Wing and that I should give it another try.

"No!" my little snooty inspector's voice would respond. "They had their chance."

Now jump ahead in time to this week. I found myself running some errands in Upper Lake and decided to swallow my pride and eat at The Blue Wing. While I always try to stay impartial from the beginning, I will admit there was a small little part of me harboring some bad attitude from my previous experiences.

It was in the late afternoon when I arrived and they were still serving from the lunch menu, so I ordered the Asian sampler with spicy Thai chili sauce. The shrimp was cooked perfectly, and the onion rings were big, thick and crispy, although I couldn't really see what made them "Asian."

The Thai chili sauce is fairly mild and sweet. The interesting thing about the Thai chili sauce is that you can taste the heavy chili flavor in the midst of the sweetness and there is this momentary feeling of "This is going to hurt," but no strong spicy hit ever comes, just a mild burn. Even my daughter, who hates anything spicy (blame that big Norwegian part of her), could easily enjoy this sauce.

I asked my server if the Blue Wing's house Chardonnay was aged in oak or stainless steel and Allie (my server) said that since she wasn't old enough to drink and hasn't tasted it she couldn't tell me, but she quickly gave me a free sample to answer my own question. It was very good without being too "oaky," which I expect from most chardonnays, so I ordered a glass to go with my meal.

I asked to see the dinner menu mainly out of curiosity. I wanted to see if the dishes I had in the past were still around, but they weren't. This was a happy circumstance in my opinion, and for two reasons: I'm glad that the dishes that disappointed me in the past weren't still being pressed upon the public, and it's good to have a menu that's rotated often so that the staff and patrons alike don't get bored.

Although dinner was still half an hour away, my waitress offered to have the kitchen prepare something off the dinner menu for me. I'm always willing to push my luck with service industries to see what I can get away with so I asked for the marinated seafood salad, and Allie (obviously knowing I have already eaten one whole plate of food) very considerately asked if I wanted a half order or a full order.

I was very impressed that the staff was so helpful, anticipating my desires and exceeding my expectations. I frugally decided on a half order, but it was a mistake ... it was so good I would have happily gorged on a full order. The marinated seafood salad is like a ceviche but without the heavy vinegar flavor. Filled with mussels, scallops, shrimp and salmon, and served with toasted soft bread, it was worth the trip alone.

The prices are fair for the quality of food, service and ambiance. The interior has comfortable seating with a lot of warm wood, and in nice weather there's dining on the patio and garden shared with the historic Tallman Hotel (I think it's a requirement to precede Tallman with the word "historic" nowadays). With Zoom Wine's tasting room across the street, Upper Lake has a great little date night area to be enjoyed.

So here I sit with my inner Inspector Javert pouting at his revelation that he has been persecuting a respectable man for so long, but I am happy to say that my past disagreements with the menu at the Blue Wing are gone. Don't worry, I'm not going to throw myself into a river; maybe Victor Hugo would be disappointed, but then, I'm not

French.

Ross A. Christensen is an award-winning gardener and gourmet cook. He is the author of "Sushi A to Z, The Ultimate Guide" and is currently working on a new book. He has been a public speaker for many years and enjoys being involved in the community.

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