

Foodie Freak: Rob Roy's Creekside Grill & Lounge

Contributed by Ross A. Christensen
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Rob Roy Golf Club and Creekside Grill & Lounge: 16451 Golf Road, Cobb, telephone 928-0121. Lunch, Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner, Thursday, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Champagne brunch, Sundays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Reservations suggested for dinner and brunch.

I'm pretty stingy. I like to save money and consolidate every chance I get, so when my wife's birthday came around and I wanted to take her out to dinner somewhere nice I thought to myself, "And if I can take her someplace we haven't been before and do a review of the restaurant at the same time, that's being frugal"

When I was looking to purchase some property years ago I looked at some places on Cobb Mountain, and the one thing that kept going through my mind was, "This looks like Bigfoot country. If I lived here I'd be chasing Sasquatches off my deck every night."

So I'll admit that Cobb Mountain has been pretty intimidating to me and that's one of the main reasons that I haven't been to Rob Roy sooner. I know, sounds a little screwy but we all have quirks. If you do plan on eating there definitely have your route preplanned before you leave, the roads of Cobb are not accommodating for a seat-of-your-pants kind of navigator.

Reservations are recommended at Rob Roy's so I made them under a fake name just in case someone would recognize mine. We were shown to our table with a view of trees and dense underbrush ... I could sense that Bigfoot was out there watching me right then.

The décor of the restaurant is nice if a bit spartan. You don't feel like they are trying to impress you with their paintings or sculptures. It has the look of a typical golf clubhouse. There is a bar overlooking the golf course and a television above the bar. We were seated in the back and couldn't see any of that from our table which added a more elegant feel to our setting.

The wine list was almost exclusively filled with Lake County wines which I was happy to see. We ordered a bottle of the Six Sigma Cabernet Sauvignon. After all, it's cheaper than buying it by the glass.

For appetizers, I ordered the crab cakes and my wife went for the bruschetta, and for our entrees we ordered prime rib (available Fridays and Saturdays) and wild mushroom ravioli, respectively.

Our waitress Robyn was fantastic; much more professional than your average Lake County wait staff. She asked how I would like my prime rib and I said "Raw." She confirmed that I would like it as rare as possible and then was off. She was very intuitive on our needs. It was as if she was present every time we needed her yet nowhere in sight when we didn't. She was earning a very considerable tip, and if I weren't such a cheapskate she would have gotten one.

The appetizers arrived faster than I expected, but as we did arrive early in the dinner service, there were very few other diners, however as the evening went on the dining room did fill up but the service was still exceptional.

The crab cakes were — and I'm being completely honest here — the best I've ever had in my life. I've eaten crab cakes all over the world and have always been disappointed until now.

The plate had four crab cakes drizzled with an aioli set on a mesclun greens salad that was dressed with an almost ethereal dressing. My wife (who's not a seafood fan) tried the crab cake and said that they were better than ones that she's had on Chesapeake Bay (where the crab cake is a signature dish).

The exterior of the crab cake was crispy, the interior soft but not doughy. You could taste the crab and red pepper, and the celery was cooked but not soft. I tried, I actually really tried to find fault with them but I couldn't find any. They were fantastic!

My wife's bruschetta was grilled and topped with tomatoes, red onion and basil in perfect proportions, nothing overwhelmed the other. There were six to the plate and they were all of good size so she wasn't able to eat all of them; luckily I finished them for her so nothing went to waste. The only detraction from the appetizer was that tomatoes aren't in season and so they were very bland. During the summer this would be a stellar item.

The main courses also arrived quite quickly and I was pleased to see that my prime rib was perfectly cooked. Like a balance of just warm and pink yet not quite a health code concern. It was accompanied on the plate with crispy fried cheese polenta and green beans with a roasted red pepper puree, and served with au jus and horseradish sauce on the side. I love horseradish sauce with prime rib because no matter how bad the meat is you can always cover it with horseradish.

I am thrilled to say I didn't even taste the horseradish sauce for the sole reason that the au jus was — and I said this at the table to my wife — "The best jus I have ever tasted in my life." I told her that I just wanted to drink the jus like a cup of coffee.

Honestly I felt like I was in sensory overload. The beans were perfectly cooked and the red pepper puree was unique

and well matched. The crispy fried cheese polenta was excellent. Normally I expect fried polenta to be a bit oily but this wasn't at all, and the flavor was perfectly balanced so that you could experience the cheese and the corn without losing one to the other. The exterior had a slight crispness to it without trying to intimidate you with a loud crunch.

Oh yeah and my wife was here also ...

Her plate of wild mushroom ravioli was large enough that as it was set on the table I commented to Robyn, "She'll need a doggie bag for that." The ravioli was covered in a tomato cream sauce, which was a nice change from the usual marinara. The pasta had a nice al dente texture, and the wild mushrooms were nicely seasoned, not too woody or wild tasting and still had good body to their texture.

Her ravioli started out as being very good and with a balanced flavor in which no one thing overpowered the rest in the dish, but as she got further into the meal she said it was all a little too balanced and it was becoming a little boring. I still insisted she take the leftover portion home. Waste not, want not!

Once her pasta was boxed up and my plate of food reduced to scraps of fat we looked at having dessert. As always I went for a glass of port, since I'm not a big fan of sweets. The Grahams Six Grapes port was great, a definite must have. My wife was hoping for some sort of flan or crême caramel but that evidently was served the day before. She went for the tiramisu but they were out of that also so she just dropped the idea of dessert altogether. Besides, we still had plenty of the Six Sigma left for her to drink while I had the port.

The prices for everything were high if compared to most Lake County restaurants but were quite fair for the meal and service delivered.

To give the meal a summary, I had the best meal I've had in over a decade, and my wife had a very good meal with charming company to pay for it. Israel Gonzales is the chef at Rob Roy and it was difficult for me to not ask to meet him and thank him for the amazing meal. But I will look at attending any events that he cooks for. After all I don't think I've ever used the phrase "best I've ever had" twice in one meal EVER before.

So we happily went back to our car in the parking lot, on our way home and — what was that in the trees? It looked like a man, but big and hairy

(Note from Ross's wife: Don't let him fool you. Ross is a very generous tipper. Robyn was tipped about 30 percent. Ross loves the quote from the movie "My Blue Heaven": "Actually it's not tipping I believe in ... It's over tipping.")

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.