

DINING OUT

A CLEAR NO. 1

IT'S THE NUMBER IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NAME THAT REFLECTS QUALITY OF GRILL ONE ELEVEN

After a tip from former Press restaurant reviewer Pete DeMaagd and his wife, Tuti, my husband, Hoyt, and I finally know what the two food enthusiasts were raving about when they recommended we try Grill One Eleven in Rockford.

Facing away from the street, the entrance leads to a classy two-story dining area with large windows and an elegant granite and mahogany bar. Appointed in warm earth tones, the upper level features a cozy seating area with sofas and a fireplace and an outdoor patio. The restaurant is owned by Amy and Aaron Zainea, who also own Marinades Pizza Bistro next door.

For appetizers, we shared the three happiness spring rolls (\$8) and the stuffed portabella (\$8). Other first-course nibbles include a barbecue corn tostada (\$8), white cheddar cheese fondue (\$8) and shrimp scampi Rockefeller (\$9).

Stuffed with garlic, shallots, mushroom puree and roasted peppers, the delicious portabellas were amazing. Served with an Italian pepper coulis, the mushrooms were imbued with delicate flavors.

The spring rolls also were delicious. Plump and crisp with a savory chicken filling, the rolls came with spicy mustard and a soy plum peanut sauce for dipping, along with two small mounds of sticky jasmine rice pilaf. Fresh, colorful and totally delectable, the combination of these flavors was amazing.

Putting a unique twist on American cuisine, the menu also offers quite a selection of soups, salads, sandwiches and burgers, along with a nice array of entrees. Those include



KATHY CARRIER

RESTAURANT REVIEW

peach barbecue rubbed salmon (\$15), blackened sea bass (\$23) and five-mushroom fettuccini (\$14).

Several chicken entrees and steaks also are offered, and new items are added seasonally. Always on the prowl for the perfect steak, Hoyt chose the Courtland haystack rib-eye (\$19), while I opted for the seafood-stuffed grouper (\$17).

Primo rib-eye

Grilled medium rare, Hoyt's steak was tender and juicy and had great flavor. Perfectly cooked, it had a nice crispness on its outer edges. Topped with haystack onions, the steak was served with chipotle redskin smashed potatoes and fresh green beans.

My grouper also was excellent. With its delicate flavor and flaky texture, the fish was enhanced by its stuffing of scallops, shrimp and crab. Oven-roasted with chive almond butter, the grouper had subtle levels of flavorful elements, all marvelously blending. Jasmine rice pilaf and fresh green beans complemented the meal.

With just enough room left for each of us to share a small dessert, we polished off the evening with the chocolate raspberry lava cake (\$4). Served warm with a molten chocolate center, the petite dessert was topped with vanilla ice cream and drizzled with chocolate and raspberry sauce. A true delight, the dessert's elements of hot, cold and sweet gave us shivers of pleasure.

Pete and Tuti were right — Grill One Eleven is a fantastic spot to discover.

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PRESS PHOTOS/DIANNE CARROLL BURDICK

On the menu: Roasted garlic herb oil, fresh-baked dill and sun-dried tomato breads, fire-grilled salmon and signature carrot cake are among Grill One Eleven's offerings.

IF YOU GO

Grill One Eleven

Where: 111 Courtland Ave., Rockford

Hours: 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Saturday

When we dined: 7 p.m. Saturday, April 5

Wait to be seated: None
Wait for food to arrive: 15 minutes

Dress code: Business casual

Ambience: Well-appointed in warm, earthy colors, the restaurant is casual, yet elegant and offers a comfortable bar area, upper-

level seating and an outdoor patio.

Parking: On street and in lot
Price range: Appetizers are \$5-\$9; entrees run from \$11 for sun-dried gouda mostaccioli to \$24 for the One Eleven filet.

Credit cards: All major
Alcohol: Beer, wine, mixed drinks

Smoke-free: Yes
Reservations: Accepted
Call them: 863-3111

Call us: Know a great place to dine out? Call The Press Entertainment department at 222-5291, or e-mail weekend@grpress.com.



The brass: Co-owners Amy and Aaron Zainea pause for a photo with chef Matt Lenkiewicz, left, at Grill One Eleven's bar.