

# A room with a view

But even when it's dark out, there are impressive sights on the plates

BY JOHN KERNAGHAN

My experience with hotel restaurants near expressways and those featuring top-floor positioning with panoramic views isn't memorable.

And the combination of the two seems like a recipe for high-priced mediocrity. A captive audience of weary travellers and the sales value of the view often inflates prices without boosting culinary quality.

But the perch boasted by the Casablanca Steak & Seafood Restaurant, located at the Casablanca Winery Inn not far off the QEW in Grimsby defied those preconceptions, delivering excellent quality at mid- to upper-tier pricing. Mind you, I didn't venture near the \$40 entrées.

And the view? I'll have to check out the 180-degree perspective of Lake Ontario from the eighth floor some other time, when darkness doesn't fall so early.

But the sightlines inside were just fine and I focused on my plate, which was good viewing.

The pleasant server brought fresh herbed focaccia to the table to start and the moist bread was welcome with buds of room-temperature butter.

I started with the grilled vegetable tower (\$10), a 10-centimetre cylinder spiked on a wooden pick.

It was top down terrific with the medley of fresh and crisp vegetables alternating with rich layers of goat cheese. Concentric circles of balsamic reduction ringed the tower, doing double duty as an artistic touch and sweet accompaniment.

I worked my way down from parsley garnish through sweet rings of caramelized red onion, zucchini, red and green pepper segments and more onion before getting to a base of eggplant.

The decadent cheese was in fine harmony with the slightly crunchy veggie component, a case of yin and yang.

While I waited for the main, Asian prawns (\$32), I took note of the two-level room, with a few tables and a big three-sided bar slightly raised above



RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

### Casablanca Steak & Seafood Restaurant

4 Windward Dr., Grimsby  
905-309-7171  
casablancawineryinn.com

**The look:** Big and open.

**The feel:** Rich and relaxed

**What you'll pay:** Appetizers include breaded crab cakes for \$10 and seared bacon-wrapped scallops for \$12. Soup of the day is \$5 and salads run from mixed greens at \$7 to boccinini and tomato with basil leaves

for \$9. Grilled mains range from an eight-ounce New York strip loin steak for \$28 to vanilla sugar-crust-ved veal chop for \$40.

Other entrées are eight- and 10-ounce prime rib for \$25 and \$29, smoked chicken farfalle for \$20, broiled salmon for \$28, and rack of lamb in a Dijon-herb crust for \$42. Desserts are \$8 and there's a wide range of wines with Niagara vintages prominent.

**Hours:** 5 to 10 p.m. for dinner, Tuesday to Sunday. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible.

the main dining area and the three-window expanse overlooking the lake.

The prawn dish was another winner, the four huge seafood crescents perfectly done with a lightly crisp exterior and flesh flush with flavour.

They were dressed in miniskirts of shell and sautéed in ginger, just enough ginger. Meantime, julienned peppers swirled around a mound of sticky rice and a sweet and sharp coconut sauce invested the shallow bowl with a memorable finish.

The texture of the sticky rice as it ab-

sorbed that sauce was a nice element.

But with two rich courses eagerly consumed, dessert options such as citrus bread pudding and lemon blueberry mille-feuille would have to be put off to another day.

Casablanca is at the higher end of the pricing realm for these parts but there is enough range to provide some flexibility. With professional service and a highly agreeable setting, it is recommended.

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