



June 5, 2005

DINING OUT

Not by Beef Alone

By [JOANNE STARKEY](#)

TWENTY-ONE MAIN, a steakhouse in an imposing white house in West Sayville, has the look of a grande dame, with décor to match.

Diners climb a few flower-flanked steps to enter the restaurant. There is a lively bar with a pianist to the left and a formal dining room to the right. The look runs to navy floral carpeting, potted palms, caramel jacquard tablecloths. Look hard through the row of windows; you may catch a glimpse of a swan on the nearby pond.

The service staff is personable and knowledgeable. Whenever our waitress was nearby, she directed the delivery of dishes to her. When she was elsewhere, the runners' accuracy was hit or miss. At midweek, the pace of the meal was perfect, neither too fast nor too slow. On a busy Friday, it was staccato, with a long wait before dessert.

The food is very good and not as expensive as it might be at a North Shore steakhouse. The T-bone for two is \$62, compared with \$84 farther north. There are also twice as many entrees in the \$20-to-\$30 range, versus those over \$30.

A rousing opening dish for meat lovers was the meaty St. Louis-style pork ribs with fall-away tender meat and a lush bourbon sauce. A lighter choice and just as good was the crab cocktail: sweet lumps of crab served with both a tangy lemon aioli and a spicy cocktail sauce. Two sauces, an appealing rémoulade and the expected cocktail, also accompanied the exemplary shrimp cocktail of four firm jumbos.

Two other good seafood appetizers were a large filler-free crab cake and a tasty lobster bisque with garnishes of chives, lobster from the knuckle and drizzles of crème fraîche.

The lone shortfall among the appetizers were the clams casino, very tiny clams dwarfed by bacon in an unappealing cream sauce.

Among the salads sampled were an iceberg wedge with a creamy Gorgonzola dressing and a garnish of summer-quality tomatoes; a deconstructed Caesar with quartered hearts of romaine, a classic Caesar dressing and Parmesan crostini rather than the usual croutons.

Steaks, of course, are the main story at a steakhouse, but not the only one. We were impressed with the very juicy double-cut chops; the large, tender veal tenderloin; and a salmon steak, a special that came with merlot butter and a salad of roasted pepper, artichoke hearts and grape tomatoes, served at room temperature.

The steaks are prime dry-aged beef. The 12-ounce filet mignon (\$28) was juicy, tender and satisfying. We also gave high marks to the porterhouse. The 32-ounce rib-eye had impressive heft but was not as flavorful as the other cuts.

One night there was also the option of a 12-ounce Kobe beef sirloin for \$65, but the \$28 filet mignon was just as good. Even the Kobe beef was everything a steak should be and was served with wonderful grilled asparagus and garlic mashed potatoes.

Side dishes here are not the usual humdrum lineup. The creamed spinach was flavored with cheese and came with a crown of pancetta. The crunchy home fries were cubed and fried with onions and bits of sweet red pepper as well. The thin, slightly spiced shoestring onion rings are also a must. Even usually mundane steamed broccoli came with a creditable Hollandaise.

Another break-the-mold selection are the blue cheese potato croquettes: four-inch logs of mashed potatoes laced with cheese and fried till crisp.

Along with the usual heavy desserts was a very welcome lighter offering of mixed berries topped with whipped cream. Three rich desserts to try are the creamy cheesecake, the flourless chocolate cake with the texture of a chewy brownie and the silk and satin - layers of chocolate cake, cheesecake and chocolate mousse covered in ganache.

An extra bit of sweetness comes with the check. Chocolate truffles are presented as a parting gift.

21 Main

21 Montauk Highway, West Sayville, (631) 567-0900

Very Good

ATMOSPHERE Upscale steakhouse in a charming old house.

SERVICE Sweet, knowledgeable waiters; runners are of the "who ordered the T-bone?" school.

SOUND LEVEL Average.

RECOMMENDED DISHES Crab cake, pork ribs, lobster bisque, Caesar salad, iceberg lettuce and tomato salad, shrimp cocktail, crab cocktail, porterhouse, filet mignon, veal sirloin, lamb chops, Kobe beef sirloin, salmon steak, all side dishes, mixed berries, silk and satin, cheesecake, chocolate cake.

WINE list A reasonable selection of 109 bottles (\$15 to \$210), nearly half under \$30. Numerous selections at \$15.

PRICE RANGE Appetizers \$6 to \$14, entrees \$18 to \$65, side dishes \$6, desserts \$6.

CREDIT CARDS All.

HOURS 5 to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 4 to 10 p.m. on Sunday.

RESERVATIONS Recommended.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY Six steps at entrance. Restrooms are accessible.

REVIEWED BY THE TIMES June 5, 2005.

RATINGS Extraordinary, Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory, Fair, Poor. Ratings reflect the reviewer's reaction to food, ambience and service, with price taken into consideration. Menu listings and prices are subject to change.

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