

"Simply Satisfying"

Kingston's Ship to Shore serves up the classics in a straightforward, yet scrumptious, way

By Lynn Hazlewoo

When I moved to Manhattan in the 1970s, surf and turf was still a relative newcomer on steakhouse menus. It seemed to me then — young and near-penniless — the ultimate indulgence. Can't decide whether to splurge on lobster or steak? Have both! One memorable evening, I so much enjoyed a huge plate of it that, after I'd finished, I dabbed my lips with my napkin and ordered another one.

I recounted this youthful act of gluttony to my spouse after we discovered surf and turf on the menu at Ship to Shore in Kingston. The place bills its cuisine as a blend of old New York-style steakhouse and progressive American, but these days "progressive" usually wins, with chefs taking liberties to tart up traditional dishes — often to good effect, it's true. But once in a while, something straightforward is what's wanted. Here, the surf and turf came unsullied by highfalutin alterations — and was satisfying enough that I ordered and ate just the one.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was a Thursday night in summer when we headed for Kingston's Rondout District — and the streets were so cheerfully lively, we didn't even mind having to search for a parking spot. Ship to Shore is set in a Victorian storefront facing the Rondout Creek.

There are a few sidewalk tables where (if you crane) you can see boats moored on the water across the esplanade. That evening, the outdoor tables were taken, and the front room was full, so we wound up in the bar area, where a lively crowd had gathered for after-work drinks. It felt as festive in the simple brick and wood space as in the streets outside, although a bit deafening. (The ruckus died down after a while, and there's a cozy back room for anyone who wants more peace.)

True to its mission, Ship to Shore's menu offers a variety of the usual steak and seafood dishes, and also encompasses that sometimes confusing contemporary middle ground of comfort food with little gourmet touches — standards with style. Recent favorites make an appearance — things like Thai red curry chicken,

panko crusted tilapia, Moroccan spiced rack of lamb and such.

The wine list includes about 50 bottles from all over, running from a very moderate \$18 to \$115. (On Wednesdays, there's a Wine Lover's Dinner, when all wines are half price.)

We started out with two nouveau traditional appetizers: lobster and shrimp spring rolls and pulled duck salad. The spring rolls were nicely done, the golden, crispy wrappers folded around a blend of chopped shrimp and lobster, with shiitake mushrooms adding an earthy note to the sweet, clean taste of the crustaceans. Once dunked in the plum hoisin sauce the lobster was hard to detect, but the overall effect was delicious.

The Stone Church Farm pulled duck salad came with avocado, tomatoes, pineapple black bean salsa and sesame orange vinaigrette. The duck — a generous portion — was tender and moist, with a very pleasing texture, and the avocado and tiny pineapple cubes had a sparkly, piquant presence that heightened the richness of the duck meat. The glistening black beans made me think of Coco Chanel's famous observation that to be well dressed you should put on your jewelry and then take one piece off — although the beans tasted good, they seemed like that one unnecessary thing. My spouse, who couldn't care less about Coco Chanel, disagreed.

His entrée, sweet jerk chili-seared ahi tuna, was so prettily presented that in the dim light it looked almost like a fruit tart. A cake of sweet sticky rice was topped by fanned-out slices of chili crusted tuna, topped in turn by a dollop of glistening sweet red slaw. The tuna was done just right, with the center barely touched by heat, and the slightest hint of char beneath the crust. The red cabbage was almost too subtly seasoned to be called slaw, but both it and the rice were a nice contrast to the rather aggressive chili crust.

As I said, the surf and turf was an unadorned classic — a perfectly broiled lobster tail, a little pot of roasted garlic butter for dunking, and a 12-ounce filet, cooked precisely as I asked. Skinny green beans and a small mountain of steak fries rounded it out. It was satisfyingly simple and tasty.

As I was still moseying down memory lane, we decided to end with another classic: crème brûlée. This one was vanilla and banana, although the chef has since stopped doing a "crème brûlée du jour" and now serves only the vanilla version. A dessert he wouldn't dare alter is one that's been on the menu since the restaurant opened: the warm Godiva chocolate cake, a rich brownie-like concoction served with vanilla ice cream and raspberry sauce.

Service was well-meaning and friendly, though you may have to wave your arms

about to get what you want on a busy night. But even that small hitch adds to the urban, fun feel of the place.

We've had several memorably good lunches at Ship to Shore, too, when the salads, sandwiches and wraps cover the same range of plain to more fancy fare. Whether you want a cool place to eat on a hot summer's day, or a warm, cozy escape from the cold in winter, just sail in here. There's something for everyone.