

MoonDoggies Cafe

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 30 September 2009 03:47

Mark Shaffer and his merry band of feasters find fresh local flavor in Port Royal



The Lowdown

Location: 10th Street at Paris Avenue in Historic Port Royal

Atmosphere: Relaxed and casual “like coming into someone’s home”

Cuisine: “Fresh local seafood & hand cut steaks”

Alcohol: Beer, wine, cocktails

Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, Lunch 11:30 – 5:00, Dinner 5:00 – 9:00.

Reservations: 843-522-1222

Etcetera: The homey, ivy covered screened-in back porch and fenced courtyard is dog friendly with a complimentary serving of roast beef for your Scooby to snack on. Wednesday night is Prime Rib Night (two for one). Live music Friday and Saturday evenings.

Website: www.moondoggiescafe.net

Prologue

First of all, the name MoonDoggies has absolutely nothing to with Gidget’s boyfriend of the same name from the old surfer movies of the last millenium. For those of you who have no reference for this, one word: Google. However, co-owner, chef and chief guitar player, Jeff Harris does confess to growing up in northern Florida practically attached to a surfboard. And MoonDoggies’ menu does embrace a certain “surf-sational” sensibility (entrees are “Big Kahunas,” etc.). The name, though, comes courtesy of Harris’ beloved Weimaraner, Miss Tascha (registered as Tascha’s Moon Cyndre) who celebrated Super Bowl Sunday, 1994, by whelping ten pups. Whether this was a breed-specific appreciation of the NFL or just Miss Tascha’s way of rooting for the Cowboys remains a mystery. Miss Tascha lives on in the restaurant’s logo and in the main dining room’s famous mural as she watches over her daughter, Dallas Alice, from above on a Lowcountry crescent moon. Were I only as keen on symbology as Robert Langdon, I would have foreseen that we would all be over the moon by evening’s end.

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Part I: Drinks



MoonDoggies has welcomed patrons beneath stately, moss-drenched oaks here in the heart of Port Royal's Historic District for nearly half a decade. The homey feel to the place is no mistake – there's a lot of family involved in MoonDoggies. The building is an old converted Lowcountry home just a good chuck of an oyster shell from the marsh and Sandy Point, a nice thing to remember on a moonlit evening if you're in the mood for an after dinner stroll. Most of the first floor is wrapped in a rambling screened porch. A quarter of this is completely covered in English Ivy, floor to ceiling, creating a kind of leafy green grotto. The main dining room, or Lodge Room is a vaulted chapel of wood, exposed beams and windows – rustic and airy. The richly stained flooring is tongue and groove heart pine salvaged by the original owner from old boxcars, polished by the cargo of time. Combined with the intimate lighting and the ivy draped porch the ambience is almost surreal – like a Lowcountry “Midsummer Night's Dream” – in the waning of the day.



“Could I offer anyone a cocktail?” asks our hostess for the evening. Nancy Vista is part owner and Jeff Harris' sister. What used to be the gift shop off the front foyer will soon become a low-key cocktail lounge where customers “can wait comfy,” says Jeff. Don't expect the trendy, roving bar crowd, though. The priority at MoonDoggies, says Jeff will always be about the food, always fresh and local.

“I'm making Mai Tai's and Cosmopolitans this evening,” Nancy announces. In a sudden and disturbing move the majority of the table orders Cosmos, including one of the *guys* (you *know* who you are). The rest of us wisely elect to sample from the restaurant's compact but well-rounded wine list with Nancy's suggestion of two whites and a red: the Natura Sauvignon Blanc (Chile), the Little Black Dress Pinot Grigio (Italy) and the Bonterra Merlot (California).

Table Talk:

(on the Natura)

“Unbelievably smooth, very fruity – I’m not playing with you – definite hints of apple. A bit of oak, but definitely very light the way Sauvignon Blanc should be.

“That’s a winner. That’s a Granny Smith.”

All three wines represent something terrific. Each is made with organic grapes and is a phenomenal value by the glass or by the bottle. The word “value” tends to crop up a lot these days and often has little or no application when searching a wine list for something that is both drinkable and decently priced. Moodoggies offers both and more so. The Bonterra Merlot (which our end of the table labeled “exquisite”) took “Best of Show” at the 2008 Hilton Head Wine Festival. At \$8/\$29 it’s the priciest thing on the menu. There are plenty of bottles under \$20 and everything’s available by the glass, most starting at around \$5.

Part II: Before the Breakers (appetizers)

Fried Pickle Chips with Horseradish Sauce & Ranch Dressing

Roasted Red Pepper & Artichoke Bake

Shrimp on a Stick with Remoulade

Coconut Shrimp with Orange Marmalade Horseradish Sauce

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