

Upscale vegetarian cuisine at Greens



The view from
Greens
Restaurant.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SAN FRANCISCO – Faced with the task of picking any restaurant I wanted to go in San Francisco for my birthday, I went with the one I knew would not disappoint – Greens.

Sept. 25 was the third time I had dined at this vegetarian wonder at Fort Mason, the old fortified military base first established by Spaniards.

What keeps me wanting to return to Greens is the incredible food that proves eating a vegetarian meal goes so far beyond a cardboard tasting burger, scary tofu dishes, bland and mushy vegetables, portabella mushrooms and pasta.

As a vegetarian, this is one of those rare moments where I have a difficult time deciding what to order. The only criticism I have of Greens is there isn't a sampler platter.

Early dinner reservations because of going to see the San Francisco Symphony that evening prove fortuitous. It means

everyone with 5:30pm reservations gets a window seat.

Sailboats rock gently. Windsurfers jump the waves of the bay. Fog rolls in over the Golden Gate Bridge. Like a movie script, it dissipates as sunset arrives.

I have a hard time focusing on the menu as I notice a seal swimming below the window – adding that San Francisco touch.

But my stomach growls, saying, “Let’s get on with ordering.”

Leslie, the ever-so punctual waiter, brings almonds to start with. What a nice change. Scrumptious bread with organic butter follows.

Sue and I each have a cup of Moroccan Lentil Soup (\$7.50).

“I would say this is one of the best soups I have ever had,” Sue says.

The seasonings were perfect – spicy, but not overpowering.

I order the Mascarpone Leek Risotto Cake with chanterelle mushrooms, sweet 100 and sungold cherry tomatoes, roasted Walla Walla onions, Savoy spinach, herb cream and grana padano. (\$24)

It didn’t matter, and still doesn’t, that I don’t know what all that is.

I didn’t want to put my fork down, but at the same time I didn’t want to inhale my entree. I tried to pace myself by taking sips of the Sonoma Cuvee Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that complemented both of our meals.

I can’t do justice in describing this meal. Superlatives seem trivial. The nuance of flavors, the presentation, the marrying of flavors – it’s as though Executive Chef Annie Somerville created a concerto for the palate.

Sue and I traded a bite. Good thing we each liked what we had

ordered because I really didn't want to share.

She ordered the Provencal Eightball Squash with Japanese eggplant, peppers, roasted onions, asiago, pine nuts and basil; served with roasted tomato sauce, grilled fingerling potatoes and torpedo onions on rosemary skewer, summer beans with shallots and pepper flakes. (\$23)

She marveled at the sweetness of the sauce being balanced by the salt on the potatoes. She called the sauce killer.

"I think most people are afraid to order vegetarian because it's boring and empty," Sue said. Nothing was boring this night.

When Somerville came by the table I told her I wanted to order more items – not because I was hungry, but because everything sounded good.

She seemed a bit jealous that we live in South Lake Tahoe. The chef said she would love to take off from late August through October to be in the mountains. She likes being among the 10,000-foot peaks along Highway 395.

Maybe a lodging for food trade needs to be worked out.

I have two cookbooks written by Somerville. In 2004, I saw her demonstration during the annual Yosemite Chef's Holidays at the Ahwahnee. She will be in Yosemite for the 2010 event during the last session, Feb. 3-4. Yosemite Chefs Holidays at the Ahwahnee is Jan. 10-Feb.4. It's an event I highly recommend.

The meal wasn't over. My sister, Jann, had prearranged to pay for my birthday dessert. Sue and I split the Roasted Pear with cardamom cream mille feuille and amaretto caramel. (\$9) Next time I'll order my own.

Greens is online at www.greensrestaurant.com or call (415) 771.6222.

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