

# Audacious adventure

*Harlequin Restaurant at the Beechwood Hotel • 363 Plantation St. • 508-754-2000*

By Paul Bernard

**A**lthough not without precedent, the Beechwood Hotel's cylindrical architecture was a bold departure for Central Massachusetts. The hotel's interior carries the theme forward, juxtaposing provocative antiques, such as an authentic carousel horse, with gleaming modern materials.

Of course, these are appearances; but they set expectations for the dining experience.

Our drinks were promptly served — mine a spicy-fresh Bloody Mary, a Jameson's on the rocks for my dining companion. They were served with a basket of crisp sheets of golden fried Parmesan cheese and focaccia bread, along with garlic-rosemary infused oil for dipping. As would be the case through our entire evening, the degree of attention by our server was ideal. So was the timing of courses by the kitchen.

My appetizer choice was the coconut-almond shrimp. Three large shrimp appeared to have been pan-fried on almond slices, then served with a salsa of pineapple and pomegranate. It was a delicious contrast of tastes and textures.

My guest began with the smoked pheasant breast appetizer. Delicate paper-thin slices of moist pheasant carried a mild

smoked flavor tinged with juniper-berry, which played well off the accompanying chutney of cranberries. Sweet potato biscotti completed the dish.

I thought my choice of Harlequin's 'Salad of the Season' would be a conservative stage of what was promising to be an adventuresome meal. The waiter's energetic approval was a hint of the degree to which I had underestimated the kitchen. It was an architectural triumph. Cucumbers, sliced paper-thin, were used to create a six-inch high cylinder bursting with varieties of tender lettuce. Like a tower, it stood amid a mixture of pecan-halves, chunks of Gorgonzola cheese and sun-dried cranberries. All of this was suffused with a mild vinaigrette dressing.

My guest enjoyed an old favorite, the butternut squash and crabmeat bisque. While many changes have taken place at the Beechwood, this dish remains a classic staple.

My entrée, stuffed Statler chicken breast, was built around a boneless breast of free-range chicken and finished with a hazelnut demi-glaze. It was served over

diced pears and a Napoleon of sweet potato slices, garnished with a tumble of sautéed hazelnuts. I always think free-range means a tasty, yet gaunt avian. The Statler was indeed rich



SAMPLE MENU	
Coconut-almond shrimp	\$9
Salad	\$6
Grilled center-cut pork chop	\$22
Stuffed Statler chicken breast	\$19
Rosemont Shiraz	\$8
Dessert	\$8
Dinner for two without tip	\$107

in flavor, yet in size, it lacked nothing on its more industrially produced cousins.

The grilled center-cut pork chop ordered by my companion was two-bones thick, marinated in herbs, served over a mound of creamy polenta, and grilled to specification. Caramelized young root vegetables — carrots and a variety of beets — added color, taste and texture to the dish.

With desserts made on-premises, we acquiesced to a dome-shaped chocolate soufflé. Topped with a perfect sphere of ice cream, it was soft and moist inside and almost crisp on the outside — chocolate perfection.

Harlequin's slogan: "Dining with a dash of audacity." We found this to be completely apt. □

*Paul Bernard is a pseudonym. Comments? E-mail editorial@worcestermag.com.*