

Times Colonist (Victoria), Page D12, 15-Jun-2006

Ferry mistake proved to be a culinary blessing

By Pam Grant

ATREVIDA

Galiano Inn, Galiano Island

Local 530-3939, toll -free 1-877-530-3939

Open nightly from 6 p.m. - 9 p.m. Al fresco lunches later this summer.

Major credit cards and Interac accepted. Wheelchair accessible

Rating 5

As I drove toward the ferry on Galiano Island, I was truly content. Soon, I would be back in Victoria and out of my office before dark. But as I admired the shimmering waters and the unobstructed view of Mayne Island, something hit me. My view was also unhindered by the sight of other vehicles -- there weren't any. On Fridays there is no 5:55 p.m. sailing to Swartz Bay.

Realizing that I would now be arriving at my office shortly before midnight, I was momentarily disappointed before it occurred to me that I could now dine at the Galiano Inn.

Mel Gibb and Conny Nordin bought the inn after an unsuccessful search for a weekend cottage: "We got the zeros in the square footage wrong," advises Nordin. Over the past few years, they have crafted and expanded both the grounds and buildings, creating an oasis for the mind, body and spirit.

Atrevida's ambience is characterized by softly glowing wood, contemporary art and restrained decor -- interesting, since the name means "bold" in Spanish. With bi-level seating, upstairs boasts an impressive stone fireplace made for sitting in front of during winter storms with a large brandy. The lower area features a seven-point plaster and split log ceiling and enormous picture windows, with views of the ocean beyond the manicured lawn and carefully crafted gardens. I will probably take heat for this, but really, it's the sort of place you visit and want to ask if they allow children in, hoping that they don't.

Thankfully, the food is every bit as good as the surroundings and the only problem I had was trying to narrow down my choices as I nibbled on grilled granary bread accompanied by a quenelle of whipped butter, enhanced with roast garlic and coriander. Chef Dean Hillier's seasonally changing menu illustrates his respect for locally sourced organic produce, meats and wild seafood. With a touch of Asian influence instead of the usual overuse of miso and ginger, Atrevida offers what the textbook definition of Pacific Rim cuisine should be.

Appetizers range from \$7 - \$12 on the present menu and include thoughtfully prepared options for carnivores and vegetarians, each dish with its own tailored accompaniments. Flavours are gently complex, be it a bowl of soup made with fresh yellow and red vine-ripened tomatoes flecked with herbs, or almond crusted goat's cheese cooked on a cedar plank, dressed with thyme ver jus and served with pear roasted with lavender and honey. After the benefit of a glass of sparkling Glenora Fanatasia Zanatta (\$8) my choice was a trio of seared scallops crowned with an enormous roasted tiger prawn drenched in herb laden Cafe de Paris butter, garnished with carrot, herb and beet emulsions. I almost wept.

I considered a salad course -- local greens with orange and sesame dressing or pea shoots with blue cheese and pecan and pine nut praline, but couldn't wait for my main course.

Vegetarians and meat eaters alike would enjoy the thali (\$18) offering saag (spinach), aloo gobi (potato and cauliflower) curries, fragrant lentils (dhal) and garlic naan bread. I pondered options including wild salmon smoked with sandalwood topped with lobster, watercress beurre blanc, cous cous and wilted Asian greens and Saltspring Island half rack of lamb with a port and blackberry reduction and lemon mint risotto. I am so glad there is someone who understands the critical importance of letting meat taste like meat. A perfectly grilled steak of beef tenderloin (\$27) was enhanced with a brush of demiglace enhanced with red currants, not drowned in an undistinguished sauce overloaded with chunky fruit. Paired with caramelized onions, sauteed wild mushrooms, rustic gnocchi and asparagus spears, it was so perfect to look at, I did not want to cut into it, but once I did, I devoured it.

Dessert was unnecessary, but that is hardly the point when you have options like a terrine of blackberry, pear and raspberry sorbets, or my choice of flambéed strawberries served with cracked pepper and vanilla bean ice cream.

The wine list is notable and deserves its own review, but suffice to say there is an excellent selection (view online at www.galianoinn.com) with a couple of nice twists. First of all, while it is B.C. heavy, there is no blind allegiance to the province's bigger producers, but rather a focus on the smaller players from the Cowichan Valley and the Gulf Islands. I am also impressed by the groupings on the list, with whites divided into sections entitled aromatic, light to medium bodied and rich, and reds similarly broken out.

This is fated to be a West Coast destination. I just hope that they can open a little earlier in the day, so that those of us who cannot always stay on Galiano can partake before leaving.

RATINGS

- Rating 1 Serves food
- Rating 2 Needs work
- Rating 3 Worth a visit
- Rating 4 Very good
- Rating 5 Superb