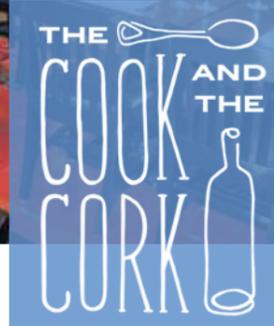


By Charles Marcanetti



## Seductively Spectacular:

The Cook and the Cork Restaurant

I never read other reviews of restaurants before I go to them and most assuredly never before I review them. However, I received so many emails and texts to “not miss this place” that I figured it was a set-up... a guerilla marketing scam of some sort, that I read the reviews. They were universally screaming accolades. Was it possible, I thought, that they bribed every food critic who had a pen, typewriter or word processor? So, my friends, I went prepared to expose the fraud. However I was more than pleasantly surprised.

The Cook and the Cork Restaurant, located in Coral Springs, is hands down the best restaurant to open its doors in the city in decades. It also the best restaurant to open its doors in the local seven city area: Parkland, Coconut Creek, Boca Raton, Pompano Beach, Lighthouse Point, Delray Beach and even Fort Lauderdale.

By now, you all know I have been in the restaurant business since I was old enough to deliver orders. For the first time in decades I can say I have found a restaurant that infuses its food with an intangible ingredient... it isn't grown, cultivated, assembled or prepared. It cannot be bought, rented, leased or borrowed. It cannot be packaged, bagged, freeze-dried or flash frozen. In fact, it cannot be touched... just experienced. Keith Blauschild and Dena Lowell, a beautiful husband and wife team, actually bring a passionate love to the cooking, the staffing, the décor, the preparation, the purveying, the hosting, the menu, the lighting... the entire dining seduction. Yes, seduction! As guests we were greeted by Dena and immediately understood that when she asks how we are doing, she really wants to know. When she tells short stories of how the

“Chef” (Keith) found this or that exotic food and just had to use it in “tonight’s sauces,” we understand that she is genuinely excited to offer the latest delicacy to us. When she runs to the kitchen to “force” Keith to come out and tell this table and that table just how he got some indescribable flavor into an otherwise well-known item, she isn't acting. She is high on the excitement of loving her guests and pleasing their palates in new and seemingly magical ways. Then, there's Keith who is somewhat lower-keyed, but, in his mellow but detailed manner explains his utter joy at combining spices and flavors and textures and aromas in a manner aimed at overpowering our fear of what we haven't ever been through... a complete sensual, border-line romantic evening shared not only with our fellow diners, but with the staff and the owners and, as weird as it sounds, with the food. I may add that all of this is accomplished in a very casual atmosphere; nothing stuffy here.

In what they have written about themselves they say, “The menu is based on simple, comfort food from many world influences, presented in a creative way. We are not fusion, we consider all food to be fusion. Chinese Mu-Shu pancakes are French crepes, or can be Italian cannelloni, which could be considered a copy of Mexican tortillas.” They are so understated they may as well have said that a Ford Mustang is a car just like a Ferrari or a Timex keeps time just like a Breitling or malt liquor is just like Louis Roederer. Get the point? Let me tell you what I believe: they do not know what impact they have on us, they do not know what perfection they approach and they do not comprehend the total immersion in the sense teasing, sense pleasing fare they offer. To them it is simply how they have always dreamed of “doing it” and they are doing it in our own back yard. There was not one bit of affectation and not one bit of haughtiness, smugness or insincerity, anywhere.



They:

- Make their own pastas, sauces, breads, and desserts.
- Smoke their own salmon, dry-age their own beef, cure their own bacon.
- Grow their own herbs, and make their own sauerkraut.
- Grind and extrude their own sweet sausage.
- Buy local fruit and vegetables when possible, and triple filter the table water.
- Purchase only the highest quality duck, lamb and fowl.

On the review evening we had Fried Chicken & Waffle. But, let's be clear... I never had a waffle like this; made with corn meal. Where did anyone ever combine a waffle with chicken breast and Andouille gravy, and of course, a tiny little bottle of ancho syrup on the side? It was followed by Lobster Mac & Cheese made by cutting out the meat from a lobster tail, dicing it and re-combining it with pasta bathed in a white cheddar cheese and tarragon sauce. It ain't Kraft. I could have eaten and eaten just that, but I'm glad we moved on to Pecan Crusted Duck Confit made with red sauerkraut & Riesling-macerated grapes. The duck was crispy coated, sweet and succulent and the accompaniments were gently added to enhance but not overpower the duck. The Cook and the Cork ought to be, and surely will be, famous for its entire menu; but, the star of the stars will definitely be the Spare Ribs. It is almost impossible to describe them, since they are not entirely Chinese style, nor are they entirely Bar-B-Q style. I suppose they are Keith-style and braised in pear juice, Korean bbq sauce and cucumber kim-chee. We also had the Tacos which are made with Italian sausage, bell pepper coulis, baby arugula, and balsamic drizzle and are adorable... that's right, adorable... you'll see.

I'm running out of room, so I'll quickly mention that we loved the Dry-Aged 10oz. NY Strip served with warm mushroom-horseradish salad and C&C steak sauce; and, if 10 ounces is too small for you they will cut the steak larger to any size you desire. I devoured the Grilled Lamb Chops which were served with tomatillo-mint chutney, rosemary roasted potatoes. Ann Landers once wrote that any food that can be picked up by hand should to be eaten by hand. I agree... witness how I eat lamb chops.

Finally, do yourselves a favor and order whatever desserts are on the menu whenever you are there. Holy, moly... they were a perfect end to a perfect evening. Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't tell you that they have an extensive wine list and, as if that isn't enough, there is an extensive Sake menu, as well. Rack after rack of well-known and not-so-well-known wines surround you; the sights and sounds and smells envelope you and the “vibe,” the love, if you will, make you want to slow down, take it all in and become part of the Cook and the Cork family.

By the time we go to press I will have been back at least once. I will be back many times, and if you see me there I'm sure we'll all be happy together. 🍷

