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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Eclectic tastes mingle at CF Food Kitchen

By Merrill Shindler

Talk about worlds in collision! On the menu at CF Food Kitchen, you'll find duck confit with a cabernet reduction, steak Diane with a cognac demi glace, and a chicken and corn maque choux. On the walls, you'll find copies of the Mona Lisa and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. And outside the door ... there's a Domino's Pizza, 7-Eleven and a discount cigarette shop.

It can give you whiplash, if you pay it any mind. Which probably you won't. For heading to CF Food Kitchen, what you should be thinking about are the empanadas and the crab cakes. Nothing else really matters.

The CF in CF Food Kitchen stands for "Chef Flores" — the restaurant is a labor of love for Chef Edwing Flores and his wife Sylvia, who runs the front of the house with wit and a touch of tenderness; this is like being served by your favorite aunt, in your favorite family dining room.

According to the chef's bio, he cooked in Washington, D.C. for two decades before moving to Southern California — which may explain

CF FOOD KITCHEN

★★★

Address: 16205 Devonshire St., Granada Hills.

Information: 818-363-5781, www.cffoodkitchen.com.

Cuisine: American.

When: Lunch, Tuesday through Friday; dinner, Tuesday through Sunday.

Details: Beer and wine. Reservations important.

Prices: About \$35 per person.

Cards: MC, V.

why his dishes have such an American edge, with a Southern chaser. Catfish po'boys, and roasted pecan and pear salad do not appear together on a lot of local menus. But at CF — much is different.

Indeed, the cooking here clearly relates to Southern California, and then hops in a culinary Winnebago, and does some traveling. Which means that those with a taste for the food that we consider to be Our Cuisine, have options like a seared ahi salad with avocado, tomato and a very snappy ginger vinaigrette. We love our seared ahi, always have, always will. It's perceived, and rightly so, as a properly

healthy dish — low in calories, high in protein, with the sort of Cal-Asian flavor we like so much.

Ahi is also served on a very good sandwich, with avocado, lettuce, tomato, cilantro and a remoulade sauce. Which begins to transit us into what may be the defining culinary style of CF. Which is to say, if you put aside the duck confit, and the salad caprese, and the empanadas, and the hummus, and the fried brie with basil oil, and the shrimp with chimichurri sauce — what you have here is a Cajun-Creole restaurant — a taste of N'Awlins, with plenty of side trips around the country, and around the globe.

Viewed as just a taste of New Orleans, this is a fine place to go for Cajun chicken tender, and Cajun fried shrimp, both served with the house remoulade, a sauce good enough to go on top of ice cream. Along with the catfish po'boy, there's a shrimp po'boy, and a crab cake sandwich — and yup, they're all moistened with remoulade.

And if you feel the need to get more serious, there's a rich, reasonably authentic chicken gumbo, with lots of okra and sausage. And a Ca-



PHOTO BY MERRILL SHINDLER

Roasted Atlantic salmon is served with mashed potatoes, vegetables and red pepper cream at CF Food Kitchen in Granada Hills.

jun jambalaya, with chicken, shrimp, scallops, sausage and mussels.

The aforementioned chicken and corn maque choux is a dish not often found this far from Bourbon Street — a tasty hodgepodge of corn, peppers, celery, onions and tomatoes, cooked into the sort of stew that would be a killer side dish come Thanksgiving, and works as a fine entrée for those tired of the same old same old.

It's served over mashed potatoes — and it's one of

those dishes that you swear you'll take home to finish later — and then it's gone before you can pack it up. Eating it becomes a bit of an obsession.

Though there's no blackened redfish, there is a blackened chicken breast, served with corn relish, red beans and rice — a dish that would be at home in the Big Easy.

And speaking of the Big Easy, that's the name of the shrimp and scallop combo with spicy Creole sauce over rice. Just one more piece of the puzzle that makes CF

Food Kitchen one of the more unexpected restaurants in town — not just in Granada Hills, but in SoCal as well.

And while you enjoy your pecan-crusted chicken, you can wonder, as did I, what the Mona Lisa and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel have to do with, well, any of it. "Eclectic" is the word. And a good word it is, too.

Merrill Shindler is a Los Angeles-based freelance dining critic. Send him email at mreats@aol.com.