

Gracious service, stellar soufflé

In Pelham, neighborhood bistro with platters of seafood

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for The Journal News

"Oh, cute little crab cakes," I murmured at the bread-crumbed coated discs on either side of my glossy spinach salad.

"That would be the goat cheese," our waiter said tactfully.

"Of course," I fumbled, and we chuckled together. This easy accommodation is the strength of Caffè Regatta. At 10:30 p.m., when we were finishing dinner, an attractive couple peeked in the door.

"Are we too late?" they asked. "Of course not," responded the kind waiter as he ushered them in, settling them at the table in the big front windows.

Caffè Regatta has filled the contemporary bistro niche in Pelham since 2001. Shellfish towers and raw bar items are popular here. The cool green walls and comfortable, no-fuss interior are soothing. The wine list is moderately priced and sensible. But the restaurant has gotten a little rusty since I last reviewed it in 2002.

That spinach salad—with walnuts, chewy, sliced roasted pears with a glaze of fruity port vinaigrette and the satisfying goat cheese alongside—turned out to be our best appetizer. The real crabcakes were sadly breaded and dry, and the spill of black bean salsa with them was salty enough to obscure all other flavor.

A special salad on the \$30 three-course, prix-fixe menu combined lobster and mango. Unfortunately the fruit was not ripe enough to create the balance you're looking for in a summery dish like this. Shrimp dumplings were light enough, steamed and served with an interesting garnish of diced green beans and mushrooms.

Brined short ribs were among four choices on the prix-fixe menu. The beef was faithfully tender and deeply flavored, and the bitter broccoli rabe with it was clothed in garlic. An entree from the regular menu didn't compare. Slice of roast lamb was so overcooked and tough it was almost uncuttable. Sliced sweet potato was an uninspired, unseasonal garnish.

Homemade ravioli filled with gorgonzola, sundried tomatoes and shrimp also suffered from too much salt, especially with minced prosciutto in the sauce. Our most re-



A view of the dining room at Caffè Regatta in Pelham.

fined entree was delicately seared King salmon, poised sparsely, almost Japanese-style, on a rectangular plate with thin, potato-slice scales and a thick stick of roasted beet.

Our Duck Pond Pinot Noir 2000 for \$26, was a lighter example. Oregon's fine reds with modern body, lively cherry flavors and bright color.

Desserts were better than I expected. A tiny, buttery plum tart was drowned in caramel gelato. A chocolate "soufflé" actually performs when we unwrapped the cylinders because a scene-stealing chocolate podfiole all over the plate. We stopped just short of licking the waxed paper that had held it together.

I suspect we have may have missed the point somewhat at Caffè Regatta by not sticking to raw bar and steers. Nevertheless this is, an ever competent local bistro. The food is attractive, if not exciting, and the service is solicitous and professional. Chef-owner Anthony Labriola is "everyone is known with a good thing." I think they usually do, I tune-up of the details would reveal what they have to offer.

In brief A tidy, reliable bistro, Caffè Regatta provides with welcome, if not with

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insider

Prix fixe here is a very good deal.

Photos by Tom Rapp/The Journal News

Use-caught Florida grouper with fingerling potatoes and steamed French green beans.

A Go quick! Before word gets out! B You'll want seconds C If there's no wait D Send it back to the kitchen E Not even if someone else pays