

Fine Dining in Casual Comfort

By Betsy Wilson

Bateaux Restaurant in the renovated Customs House in Port Royal, SC, is known for the vision, primarily of its owner Richard Wilson and former Chef Chip Ulbrich. Richard calls it elementary: simple, bold flavors. He believes portions should not be too small and overpriced, nor too large and wasteful. The evolutionary menu also is part of the basic philosophy. It carries 20 items and changes with the seasons. His belief is that too many items on a menu can detract from the creation of each dish to perfection.

The perfection of service also is key to the vision for the restaurant. Training in etiquette and excellent service is ongoing under the direction of Kelly Shelton, general manager. Staff has the opportunity for profit sharing after 12 months of working at the restaurant, a concept Kelly believes leads to dedication.

The fresh product is the basis for all of the delicious dishes. Everything is purchased locally if available. Tomatoes, corn and strawberries are especially flavorful from the neighboring farms in Beaufort County.

Fish arrives at Bateaux daily when Craig, of C&J Seafood in Beaufort, gets off the boat with it. Oysters come from the May River in neighboring Bluffton. Shrimp are the freshest wild caught shrimp fished from South Carolina waters.

Cheeses, pasta, breads, dressings – all are house made with the freshest possible ingredients.

Enter the bright airy building at the end of Paris Avenue and enjoy fine wines or cocktails with excellent service at the bar. Tables are set on this level, and

the hustle and bustle of the upstairs show kitchen is on display live on the wide screen monitor.

Upstairs, walk past the chef and his staff busily preparing for the evening meal as you are shown to your table with a view of the Beaufort River.

Small plates or appetizers for the current season include such specialties as a Tuna Trio, a Veal and Kobe Beef Mini Slider or a Grilled Eggplant.

A spectacular soup is the curry carrot bisque, although creamy oyster and spinach stew with crisped bacon is equally tasty.

Entrees of beef, duck, pork chop or seafood choices average \$25. One of the season's specials is the Bateaux Bouillabaisse which includes shrimp, clams, oysters, crawfish tails, crab, scallops, Calaspara rice and saffron shellfish fumet served with grilled bread.

The wine list is extensive and includes domestics and imports from France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and more. The wines also are especially chosen by the experienced and well traveled owner, and local wine distributors train the staff on proper service.

Bateaux was located at Whitehall on Lady's Island, on the other side of Beaufort with an unparalleled sunset view over the river to the town, until its move in the spring of 2007 to the quaint old village in Port Royal. The loyal following which frequently kept the restaurant full waited, albeit impatiently, for the renovation and the opening in the new location.

The 1838 Customs House of Savannah brick was five years in the building, and until 1890 it served as the tax office for the neighboring port. Then the building was used for Port Royal's first newspaper. The brick has been renewed, and the complete renovation last year incorporated green products such as recycled



Photos courtesy of Bateaux Restaurant

cork flooring from Portugal as well as a sophisticated air flow system to ensure a fresh health atmosphere.

Richard studied abroad at the American Embassy School System and the British Embassy School system when traveling with his parents. His restaurant work began with washing dishes at the age of 14. He studied at the Culinary Institute of West Palm Beach and progressed through positions as line chef, sous chef and then partner/owner of a number of fine establishments in Florida. He has been in Beaufort for more than 10 years, working with both the exclusive Bray's Island and Beaufort Inn before beginning his venture with Bateaux.

Executive Chef Aron Cremeans studied with Chef Ulbrich for the past two years. Aron previously owned a bistro and catering business in Michigan.

Dinner is served Monday through Saturday, and reservations are recommended. 843-379-0777. ■