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Table Talk

Burst of Flavor

The décor at Miss Lucy's Kitchen is quaint. The cuisine, which relies on area produce, is anything but **By Bernadette Vail**

Arriving in Saugerties after a long drive, my companions and I made our way across the cold, rainy, windswept street and stepped through a velvet-draped vestibule into the charming world of Miss Lucy's Kitchen. As we entered the comfortable dining room, I had a flashback to when I was a kid traveling to Manhattan. After what felt like an interminable drive, the family car would finally emerge from the grim Holland Tunnel into the wonderland of downtown Manhattan. Any lingering discomfort from the two-hour ride was immediately forgotten. Miss Lucy's had the same effect: one step inside the door and the raw spring evening became a distant memory.

Seated at one of the quaint, wooden country tables, we began to bicker about what made this place so special. Was it the friendly, relaxed demeanor of the staff? Or maybe the warm and welcoming dining room, with its eclectic country kitchen décor and long wooden bar running

almost the entire length of the restaurant? The upbeat mix of music playing in the background, and patrons chatting amiably at the bar, gave the restaurant the feel of a neighborhood hangout. In a matter of minutes I felt as comfortable as if I had been here many times before. Every detail seemed well thought out; even the bathrooms, with boxes of fresh pansies and antique mirrors, were tastefully done.

The wine list, starting at \$24, contains 60 French wines and 20 domestic choices. We decided to sample all four red wines offered by the glass, which range from \$5 to \$7 each. Three were from France; the lone U.S. offering was from Washington State. The menu choices got us arguing again — the selections were so tempting and varied we found it hard to agree on what to order. We wanted everything, and in the

Catch of the day at Miss Lucy's: pan-seared sea scallops with asparagus and tomato risotto

**Down-home touches in the dining room**

end ordered two extra appetizers by way of appeasement.

The food tastes as good as it sounds on the menu — each dish refined, yet packed with flavor. The rustic carrot ginger soup (\$5) was tinged with just the right amount of ginger, giving it a nice bite but without sacrificing the clean, fresh carrot flavor. Mussels (\$8), lots of them (and not a bad one in the bunch), were cooked in a light broth made with white wine and shallots. A hint of thyme enhanced this delicious, subtly flavored dish.

Garlic sausage and white bean ragout (\$8) was a great choice. The crisp-skinned, grilled sausage was very tasty, and its texture and spiciness was the perfect contrast to the mild white beans, which were delicately scented with sage. I ordered the house-made liverwurst (\$7) thinking that we'd give it a try and I'd take the rest home to my kids — oh well, so much for the kids. One taste of the firmly textured, earthy wurst turned into just one more bite and before we knew it, the plate was empty. The salad of fresh baby greens, tossed with a satisfyingly light vinaigrette, gently eased us toward our entrées.

It would have been just too gluttonous to order five entrées, so we sadly passed on the buttermilk fried chicken (\$14) and fresh black pepper pappardelle with duck confit (\$15). We were well rewarded with our choice of grilled lamb loin chops (\$21). The beautifully seared, meltingly tender chops were cooked to perfection. The robustly flavored medium-rare meat needed nothing more than the delicate demi-glacé sauce with which it was paired.

Fresh grilled asparagus tasted of spring, but the polenta fries were the perfect antidote to the cold rainy evening. They were scrumptious. Each thin, crisp fry concealed a surprisingly rich, dense filling, making for a sophisticated yet comforting side — tater tots for adults. The grilled gulf shrimp (\$19) had a smoky flavor and a bit of a bite; they were ideal companions for the soothing creaminess of the tomato and asparagus risotto. A dollop of parsley pesto and freshly shaved parmesan graced the top of this delicious dish.

A generous cut of rib-eye steak (\$22), served with rosemary-scented Tuscan fries and deeply flavored creamed spinach, was nicely matched with a smooth, well-balanced green peppercorn sauce. There was no quarreling as the plates made their way around the table; each dish was a winner.

We had high expectations for dessert based on our previous two courses, and were not disappointed. One friend who fancies himself a crème brûlée aficionado declared Miss Lucy's version (\$6) "the best ever." The creamy vanilla custard was crowned by a truly brittle top, and everyone agreed with our friend's assessment. Light and airy, the individual pineapple upside-down cake (\$6) was topped with a thin layer of caramelized pineapple and served with velvety, homemade caramel ice cream. This was an elegant rendition of a time-honored classic. And finally, the fudge-like, intensely chocolate-y flourless chocolate cake (\$6) could not have been better.

Husband-and-wife owners Marc Propper and Michelle Silver, as well as their chefs, are committed to serving fresh, house-made food using produce from local farmers and Miss Lucy's own garden. All their dairy, eggs, poultry, and meat are local, all-natural, and hormone- and antibiotic-free — reflecting Miss Lucy's mission statement, which you can read on the menu itself. Toward the end of the statement, the owners write, "We are lucky to be here in the Hudson Valley and are inspired by the bounty of fruits and vegetables each season has to offer." And we in the Hudson Valley are very lucky to have Miss Lucy's.

Miss Lucy's Kitchen

90 Partition St., Saugerties 845-246-9240

Lunch daily 12-3 p.m.; dinner Mon.-Fri. 5-9 p.m., Sat.-

Sun. 5-10 p.m. Brunch served Sat.-Sun. 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Appetizers are \$5-\$9, entrées (which change daily) are \$12-\$22. Desserts are \$6.