

Old walls tell tales of lively, trendy meals at Riegelsville Inn

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By Susan Gottshall

Following my recent dinner at the Riegelsville inn, I found myself wondering why it took so long for the restaurant to get on my radar - after all, it's only been around more than a century and a half.

This old inn has a lot going for it, not the least of which is its location, tucked between the Delaware River and canal, just off Route 611 south of Easton. Then there's the inherent character and ambience of a mid 19th century stone inn, and let's not forget about the food which I found creative, interesting and well prepared.

It was a nippy night when I visited, but a fire in the dining room's large walk in style stone fireplace immediately enveloped me in warmth. I soon realized, however, that more than heat from a burning log was producing warmth - namely, the decor's honey-golden wood planked flooring, interior stonewalls and open beam ceiling.

Along with the tin ceiling and tile bar in the tavern, these aged characteristics of the inn built in 1838 by Benjamin Riegel, Riegelsville's founder spoke silently of a time when life must have been slower and quieter, offering respite however brief - from the hurry up days of this 21st century.

The inn's fare, described as "innovative American cuisine" rings true to its promise.

About a dozen each of appetizers and entrees feature classics such as Caesar salad, crab cakes and filet mignon au poivre, along with newly created selections such as black bean cakes with mixed greens, goat cheese cream and ancho chili sauce or a braised lamb shank with roasted root vegetables, pear mint compote and rosemary garlic demi glace.

Passing over appetizer selections such as smoked salmon crostini with roasted beets, horseradish cream and fried capers or calamari with shaved fennel salad, aioli and balsamic reduction, we settled on sampling butternut squash soup and a trio of housemade sausages.

The former, drizzled with hazelnut oil, was satisfyingly thick with a portion of unprocessed texture from the squash adding its own sort of balance to the soup's creaminess. Refreshingly different, the flavor offered more a hint of smoke or subtle nuttiness, rather than the often used cinnamon or nutmeg touch.

So different were the flavors of the sausage trio that eating this appetizer approached a treasure hunt, as we tried to identify seasonings and ingredients in the Portuguese pork, mushroom, and seafood varieties, along with their intriguing garnishing sauces pesto arugula, ancho chili and red wine braised fennel.

Miso poached salmon, moist and flaky, was touched with salty smokiness from the fermented soybean paste and



THE RICH VINTAGE ATMOSPHERE reflects a quieter time at the Riegelsville Inn, outside of Easton

accented with ginger rum sauce, which rounded out the flavor. Accompaniments included leek shiitake risotto (creamy and subtler than I might have expected) and Chinese long beans (cooked just right). A garnish of fried scallions added a touch of whimsy to the plate.

One of the best renditions of duck I've had was the Riegelsville Inn's. A sautéed breast and leg confit were served with brandied cherry sauce - a ravishingly deep red concentration of rich fruit flavor that enhanced the fowl's dark meat and flavor.

Mashed sweet potatoes played second fiddle to the duck's assertive presence. Chard, however was a different story: Stunning in the intense colors of red and deep green that it added to the plate,

this member of the beet family contributed, as well, bright flavor and the textural contrast of al dente crunch.

From among carrot cake with cream cheese frosting, brownie cheesecake, homemade rice pudding, and several additional selections - each their own unique set of sweet temptations it was the inn's bread pudding that made the idea of dessert irresistible.

Two slices of the excellent, dense and moist pudding, ever so subtly flavored with cinnamon, were draped with a thin, custard style sauce that added another layer of soft flavor. The pudding was temptation's sweet satisfaction, and as a dessert with a long history, just like the Riegelsville Inn - a fitting finale to a lovely meal.

RIEGELSVILLE INN

10-12 Delaware Road
Riegelsville, PA
610-749-0100
<http://www.riegelsvilleinn.com>

Hours: 5-9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 5-10 p.m. Friday; noon-10 p.m. Saturday (noon-5 p.m. lunch; 5-10 p.m. dinner); 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday (10:30 a.m.-3 p.m. brunch; 3-5 p.m. lunch; 5-8 p.m. dinner); closed Monday; reservations recommended on weekends.

Prices: Appetizers: \$5 to \$10

Entrees: \$15 to \$30

Desserts: \$5.

Credit Cards: Major credit cards accepted.

Bar: Full bar.

Smoking: Permitted in tavern only.

Accessibility: Entry wheelchair accessible; stair to second floor restrooms

Susan Gottshall is a freelance restaurant reviewer for Go Guide. Gottshall, who tells it like it is, attempts to remain anonymous during restaurant visits. All meals are paid for by The Morning Call.
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