

# 4.5.6.Fish Adds Up

REVIEWED BY STEVE MARSEY

AS A CHILD, he was brought exotic foods by his father who was an international commercial pilot, and he chose medicine as a profession. His wife owns a lumber company and is chairperson of a local government commission. Her brother runs junkets to the Caribbean for sun and fun. They merge passions and entrepreneurial spirit to open a high-profile restaurant, luring their favorite chef from the Bahamas to run the kitchen. What could be the premise for the next reality television series is actually the dynamics behind 4.5.6.Fish, which opened last November at the corner of Granby and Charlotte Streets in downtown Norfolk. Ronald Zoby, his sister Barbara Zoby and her husband Sture Sigfred are co-owners and Stephen Bastian serves as executive chef of this predominately seafood restaurant.

The restaurant's build-out is impressive, with rich African mahogany walls highlighted by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of downtown Norfolk complementing the original terrazzo floor of the almost 100-year-old building. Compared to some downtown Norfolk venues with a younger, baseball cap-optional clientele, here there's a grown-up, tony ambiance. A stunning glass waterfall divides the polished copper bar and lounge area from main dining, and there's a private room in the rear. Belt driven ceiling fans rotate from above while conversations fill the air from table level, sometimes blocking out the background music. The restaurant sounds as if it's full when only half so,



(Photo by Kathy Keene)

The menu at 4.5.6 Fish pays homage to Executive Chef Stephen Bastian's Bahamian roots.

and the energy increases from there. An immediate success, drawing from nearby upscale neighborhoods and high rise and rent office buildings, it's often as busy mid-week as other restaurants are on Saturday night.

The menu pays homage to chef Bastian's

Bahamian roots with the Caribbean classic, conch chowder (\$6). Although the soup had more heat from spice than temperature and modest for bowl-sized (Sigfred subsequently stated that my serving was an unfortunate anomaly and the expected portion is to the break in the bowl), this rendition was laden with tender meat from the warm-water snail.

Fried oysters (\$8), lightly breaded in a spicy mix with sesame seeds were fried to golden brown and garnished with garlic chili mayonnaise. The oysters rested atop a delicious, although deceptively spicy, Japanese seaweed salad, and I managed the oysters as easily as the wakame salad using the chopsticks brought with the appetizer. The spice was nice and the oysters plump.

The fisherman's steamer (\$9) appetizer was a bowlful of shell-on mussels, baby clams, and crawfish along with halved grape tomatoes atop a fish stock based butter broth. The mussels had the best flavor of the crustaceans with the clams tender but lacking sweetness and the crawfish tails placed at the rear of my ranking. I couldn't detect menu-included ginger in the broth, which didn't pair well with the shellfish.

"4.5.6 Grouper Filet" (\$22) was worthy as a signature entrée. A large portion, moist and succulent, the fish was accompanied with sweet (fully ripened) fried plantains for a Caribbean accent and sautéed spinach. The balsamic Creole sauce had nice flavor with only a hint of heat from spice.

(continued on page 50)

## 4.5.6.Fish Adds Up

(continued from page 48)

Just as moist, in part from the steamed preparation, was the Chilean sea bass entrée. Attractively priced at (\$17), the mild flavored fillet was well suited for the accompanying Asian inspired shiitake mushrooms and ginger asparagus side vegetables rounding out the dish.

Landlubbers need not be pariahs at 4.5.6.Fish with chicken, beef and lamb menu offerings. The Australian rack of lamb (\$24) was an attractive and colorful presentation of four double chops, nicely cooked to order, with roasted sweet potato and grilled asparagus with a red wine and cherry sauce. The sweet potato had a less sugary and more complex flavor than the norm and was attractively cut like large pomme frites making them proportionate in size to the fresh tasting asparagus spears. Although tender, the lamb

Desserts are in transition at 4.5.6.Fish, partly due to the new menu, and according to Sigfred, because of the impending hiring at press time of Keith Hunt (Cordon Bleu Paris), former pastry chef at the recently closed Alexis. Carrying over from old to new is the chocolate ganache cake (\$6). Here ganache refers not to an icing but the molten chocolate center. Served à la mode and using the sauce as "edible ink" to write out 4.5.6.Fish on the plate, it's both attractive and tasty.

From the new dessert menu, the ganache has competition with the chocolate sin torte (\$7), a large slice of flourless chocolate fudge cake. Other new choices include Granny Smith apple cobbler (\$7) and guava cheesecake (\$7) which premiered as a recent dessert special.

Service at 4.5.6.Fish struck a nice balance of friendliness and professionalism in demeanor. There was no effort to hurry the pace allowing for a pleasant, relaxing evening. Shortcomings like failing to include the price when describing special and removing crumbs from the table between courses were minor and are easily corrected.

4.5.6.Fish dresses up Granby Street and gives the see-and-be-seen crowd the perfect venue for a relaxing dinner or a gathering place before or after theater. With several fresh, creatively prepared seafood offerings, there's also an underlying substance to satisfy discriminating diners.

4.5.6.Fish is located at 456 Granby Street in downtown Norfolk. Tel: 623-1111