

# Orlando Sentinel

Restaurant review

## Park Plaza is aging nicely



By Heather McPherson, Orlando Sentinel Food Editor

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Has it really been 30 years? Park Plaza Gardens is celebrating three decades of fine dining with a budget-friendly twist. The dinner menu opens with a la carte prices from 30 years ago but guests can flip the page and time-travel to today's prices and menu choices as well.

The restaurant is attached to the Park Plaza Hotel (formerly the Hamilton Hotel). Inside, the vintage Winter Park destination has managed hold on to its 1922 elegance thanks to a renovation by the Spang family, who purchased it in the 70's. The hotel and restaurant are connected by a door at the end of the first wall of tall banquettes. Newcomers should find an excuse to slip into the hotel lobby. It's a step back in time worth taking in.

The restaurant includes a café up front with tables spilling out onto Park Avenue and a bar that stays boisterous most evenings. The main dining room is a large atrium with lots of natural light in the daytime and a bit of sparkle in the evening from lighted trees and small spotlights overhead.

The banquettes are nice for coziness but I've always preferred the tables. They are roomy and positioned so that you don't feel getting up will disturb another table. There is one banquette that gets my vote for worst table in Central Florida. It sits at the hotel dining room entrance, a pathway many guests take to a restroom. The table gives guests a view of the atrium, but the spot has an overriding tone of "you are almost out the door." It's a date night disaster waiting to happen.

I rarely rave about bread baskets, but Park Plaza Gardens has one that will be hard for carb-counters to resist. It is mix of buttery focaccia wedges and crispy cheese and pepper-infused flatbread. The mix is served with a plate of olive oil, but no enhancement is needed.

For dinner, we started with PPG'S signature prawns Provencal (\$13), three jumbo shrimp drenched in a lemony, white wine and garlic sauce. Tomato and shallots were also evident. Paired with a salad, it would suffice as a light meal. The margarita bruschetta (\$6) was served as one large piece of bread that easily serves three. The melted fresh mozzarella held the deep-flavored roasted tomatoes and basil in place.

For entrees, one guest time-traveled with the filet mignon (\$12.50) from the 30-year anniversary menu and then jumped back to 2010 with the plaza wedge (\$7). The filet was a perfect medium rare, however, the iceberg wedge was drizzled in an unappealing dark balsamic vinaigrette. The salad elements were fresh, but the visual not so much.

The Dijon rack of lamb (\$29) came with two large double chops crusted with a mustardy bread coating. The pan-seared sea bass (\$24), although delicious with hints of thyme and lemon, was a small portion for the cost.

At lunch, the sandwiches were stellar. The smoked turkey (\$14) with slices of green apple, brie and bacon came pressed in a croissant roll. The prime rib French dip (\$14) was draped with melted provolone and served with a horseradish au jus. The fries were what all fries should hope to be: hot from the fryer with the perfect edge of crispness.

Service was efficient and friendly both visits. PPG exudes a casual-elegance and has an old-friend feel. Both of which make special occasions all that more special, especially in the evenings.

Food Editor Heather McPherson can be reached at 407-420-5498 or [hmcpherson@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:hmcpherson@orlandosentinel.com).

### **The dish on dining**

Park Plaza Gardens

★ ★ ★

Where

: 319 S. Park Ave., Winter Park (between Lyman Avenue and New England Avenue, free valet behind the restaurant)

When:

The café is open 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-midnight Thursday and 11 a.m.- 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday; the main dining room serves lunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday, dinner 6-10 p.m. Monday-Saturday, Sunday brunch 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Sunday dinner 6-9 p.m.

Attire

: lunch, casual to business casual; dinner, resort casual to dressy

Beverages

: Full bar plus signature cocktails

Wines by the glass

: \$7-\$20

Wheelchair access:

Tight but doable

Call

: 407-645-2475

Web

: [parkplazagardens.com](http://parkplazagardens.com)

### **Dining on a budget**

The restaurant is celebrating its 30 year anniversary with special a la carte menu with entrees from \$7.95-\$14.95

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