



a magnificent beach bistro

Ocean 60 restaurant review

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Jacksonville Beach offers a plethora of restaurants, with an option for every palate. One of the most talked about upscale bistros is Ocean 60. Settling comfortably in the Jacksonville consciousness in the category of French based cuisine with a global flair, the beach bistro has gained respect in its six years, building a local following and garnering media attention for their dishes. Since opening, Ocean 60 added an excellent martini bar giving it a place in the Jax Beach bar scene.

But it isn't just about food and martinis at Ocean 60. It's also about art—on the plate as well as on the walls. Art addicts watch the walls in this bistro because Ocean 60 serves as a kind of revolving gallery of local artists. The formal

dining area stays mostly the same, but the martini room is constantly changing. Chef and owner Danny Groshell says that his mother's involvement with the artistic community in Jacksonville was the impetus for him to feature local artists on his restaurant's walls. Groshell says that his "mom was a potter" when he was growing up, and that dinner at the Groshell house was always a memorable event. Groshell grew up traveling around the world, exposing him to various cultures, art and cuisines.

The space in the bistro is divided into two rooms. The dining room contains a wine bar, an espresso station and tables adorned with white table cloths, burgundy napkins and pretty Peruvian lilies. The next room, the martini room, has more of a bar atmosphere. The martini room is where the entertainment plays, generally starting at about nine at night until about one in the morning. According to Groshell "the entertainment starts out soft and low" getting more vivacious by about ten at night. A late night menu is offered for later patrons. You'll find no cover bands here; all the music is original jazz, Flamenco or acoustic guitar. The bar might add to the fun at Ocean 60, especially on weekends, but the focus is on fine food. Those looking for a romantic meal might want to come early, before the martini bar scene begins to spill into the dining area.

I kicked off my Ocean 60 experience with an appetizer that surpassed my expectations. It wasn't too sweet and was as crisp as a granny smith. I recognized quality vodka with my first sip and was pleased to learn that they use Van Gogh Wild Appel (sic) Vodka to make their appetinis. Groshell's bar staff makes certain



they have fresh fruit nectars for their ice cold martini mixes.

Perhaps you aren't into the Martini scene, but are looking for a wine experience. Ocean 60 has that covered too. Every Monday night at 7pm, Ocean 60 holds a wine tasting. For a fee of \$15, you can taste interesting wines paired with appetizers. A Certified Wine Specialist will be on hand to inform patrons about the wines. Ocean 60's wine list features small boutique wines, although they do carry the wines that people commonly ask for.

The menu at Ocean 60, as in most upscale restaurants, changes with the seasons, though a few menu items remain the same. One of the bistro's trademark dishes is a whole fried fish, dusted in a light cornmeal, perfectly scored (so you can lift the fish right off the bone), and served with yucca fries, a Nappa cabbage salad and a brandy citrus dipping sauce. The fish will depend upon the season but the preparation remains the same.

A very light but well executed salad choice is the endive and Asian pear salad. The contrast in flavors and textures-- the slightly bitter endive, the sweet pears, crunchy walnuts and pungent blue cheese all sing together to make a veritable symphony of flavor.

If you're an adventurous diner the Adventure Dinners served by executive chef Pete Smith might be just what you're looking for. Smith earned his chef's hat by working with Matthew Medure for a few years before moving on as executive chef at Ocean 60. The concept is simple: a diner mentions any food dislikes or allergies to their servers, as well as preferences like vegan or vegetarian and the number of courses they want to eat. Back in the kitchen, Smith creates a spur of the moment meal, making every course a surprise and delight. I sampled two starters: a spur of the moment appetizer of tender scallops on freshly baked focaccia and the menu appetizer of Mayport shrimp marinated in lime juices with a mango, Roma tomato and cilantro salsa. Although the Costa Rican Shrimp Ceviche won me over with its bold flavor, I did prefer the unexpected appetizer.

Before I learned about the Adventure Dinners, I ordered the salmon, which Smith pan seared for a faultless crust. The flavorful, flawlessly cooked salmon topped a bed of angel hair pasta laced with shitake and oyster mushrooms in a salty miso ginger broth. The miso overpowered the ginger, making me wish for more ginger flavor in the dish, but the salmon was absolute perfection.

A well presented key-lime crème brûlée arrived at the table for dessert, sprinkled with powdered sugar and topped with fresh raspberries, blueberries and strawberries. This dessert charmed with creamy sweetness and tang.

I'll most likely be making a return trip to Ocean 60 in the future for their beach elegance and tempting foods. My love of seafood (which they really do well) and their stunningly good focaccia bread will keep me coming back to this beach bistro.



information

650 Ocean Boulevard, Atlantic Beach (247-0060) www.ocean60.com

RATINGS (1-5)

Atmosphere 4
Service 5
Food 4 1/2
Cost \$\$\$\$

COST GUIDE

\$ = under ten dollars for a single person
 \$\$ = over ten to twenty for a single person
 \$\$\$ = over twenty to thirty-five for a single person
 \$\$\$\$ = thirty-five and up for a single person