

A Self-Confessed Foodie

June 29, 2010

Red Lobster

I was really excited to be invited to an event at Red Lobster last week. I have to tell you, it was nothing like what I expected!

I expected to be just one of a huge group of bloggers, invited to taste the evolution of the Red Lobster menu and see the result of remodeling 9 area restaurants, just a part of a four-year project to remodel all 690 restaurants nationwide. When I got there I was shocked.



There were only three bloggers and their guests, several of whom were bloggers themselves (and I'm being very generous in calling Scott a blogger, he updates [Iron Chef Scott's Thoughts on the World](#) twice a year. He also wrote about Red Lobster so he's done for 2010 ;)). Joining us were two representatives from Red Lobster's agency and the guest of honor, Chef Michael LaDuke, Red Lobster's Senior Executive Chef.

It was an intimate gathering that really gave us a chance to grill (wood-fire grill, of course) Chef LaDuke about the menu and his vision for Red Lobster. This event was a real eye-opener for me since all I'd previously experienced from Red Lobster were their popcorn shrimp, a childhood favorite of mine!

Joining me were:



Missy from [The Marketing Mama](#)

Jennifer from [Prior Fat Girl](#)

Natasha from [Healthy and Gourmet](#)

We sat at the table and got to know each other, then food started arriving on our table. We started with one of the more established dishes on the Red Lobster menu, Lobster Pizza: Thin crust pizza topped with langostino lobster pieces, mozzarella cheese, fresh tomatoes and basil, topped with a squeeze of lemon. The lemon really made the pizza. The acid cut through the richness of the cheese and the langostino, giving the pizza a fresh taste.



The next dish was an entree off the wood-fire grill, Maui Luau Shrimp and Salmon: Wood-grilled with a sweet and spicy glaze, served with wild-rice pilaf and grilled pineapple. This was definitely one of my favorite dishes. The shrimp were beautifully cooked. I could detect just a hint of spice but it didn't overpower the seafood. There was an added sauce that provided some extra spice for those who can handle it (not me).



This was followed by an appetizer dish, Mango Jalapeno Shrimp Skewers: Wood-grilled shrimp with a spicy sauce, served with onion rings. Scott said he didn't taste much of the spice but I certainly could! My mouth was burning pleasantly when I finished eating this dish.



It was so hard to limit myself to just a few bites of each dish. I wanted to make sure I had room to try a little of everything and the food just kept coming out of the kitchen. The next dish was Maple-Glazed Chicken: Wood-grilled chicken with a maple and cherry glaze, served over wild rice pilaf. Natasha suggested on her blog that this sauce could make cardboard palatable. I agree, but I wish the cherry flavor had been a little stronger!



I really enjoyed the story that went along with the dish. Chef LaDuke said the recipe was based on childhood memories of fresh maple syrup - the good stuff, not the plastic squeeze bottle.

Red Lobster has made a conscious effort to move away from fried foods and provide healthier options. In one year's time they went from an F rating from Men's Health's Eat This, Not That, to an A- rating. Their lighthouse menu provides many healthy options for the calorie-conscious.

Our final entree was off the fresh fish menu, Wood-Grilled Tilapia with Spicy Soy Broth: Pepper-rubbed tilapia with spicy soy-lobster broth, served over fresh vegetables with wild rice pilaf. It was delicious! The fish was tender and flaky, perfectly cooked. The spicy soy broth gave it a little bit of heat (there was wasabi in it, if I recall correctly!) and a delicious flavor that didn't overpower the fish.



A few words about Red Lobster's fresh fish menu before I move on to dessert...

The fresh fish menu changes daily and is based on what is available to each restaurant. It has approximately a half-dozen choices, on top of the fresh fish dishes available on the regular menu. Each member of the waitstaff is a "fish expert", trained to know the qualities of each fish. Should the customer want details, the waitstaff carry around reference cards listing out details about each variety of fish that might be on the menu. Using these cards they can determine what fish might best suit the customer who wants, say, a flaky, mild fish.

Finally came dessert. Strawberry Cheesecake, Chocolate Wave, Warm Chocolate Chip Lava Cookie. Very tasty but absolutely huge! The Chocolate Chip Lava Cookie was by far my favorite but there's no way I could make it all the way through one on my own unless I'd skipped dinner entirely!



Drooling yet? I was really impressed with the food we tasted!

I really got quite a bit of time to chat with Chef LaDuke. I feel like I have so much more I'd like to tell you, but I think I'll save that for another post and let you go find some lunch. Red Lobster, perhaps? Stay tuned for more information from Chef LaDuke about the composition of the menu, his dream dish and what his job as a Senior Executive Chef is like!

I'll leave you with a few more photos...

Bloggers and their guests with Chef LaDuke



Chef LaDuke, Jennifer (aka A Self-Confessed Foodie) and my fiance, Scott

