

# Dining Out Review: The Dining Room at the Berkeley



P. KEVIN MORLEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

The surf and turf, with NY strip and blackened shrimp, at the Dining Room at the Berkeley.

## Related Info

**SLIDESHOW:** [The Dining Room at the Berkeley](#)

**Rating:** ★★★

**Where:** 1200

**Phone:** (804) 225-5105

**Web site:** [www.berkeleyhotel.com/eathere.html](http://www.berkeleyhotel.com/eathere.html)

**Noise level:** low

**Vegetarian options:** appetizers, salads, one entrée

**Hours:** breakfast 7-10:30 a.m. Monday-Friday; lunch 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday; dinner 5:30-10 p.m.

Monday-Saturday and 5:30-9 p.m. Sunday; brunch 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

**Prices:** dinner entrées \$14-\$28; three-course prix fixe menu \$39

**Check for two:** \$84 (including one appetizer, one entrée, one three-course prix fixe meal and tax)

DANA CRAIG RESTAURANT CRITIC

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During the past few weeks, I've found myself starting too many wishful thoughts with, "When I get my tax return back . . . "

Usually, these grandiose imaginings involve vacations, wardrobe overhauls and the latest Apple products.

Oddly enough, I've never included fine dining in these daydreams -- that is, until I realized I hadn't tried The Dining Room at The Berkeley Hotel. Shockoe Slip's AAA Four Diamond-awarded eatery.

Considering how much time I spend traversing Cary Street's cobblestone thoroughfares, I'm unsure how this gem slipped past my radar.

On a recent Friday night, I found myself sitting at an intimate window table overlooking the Slip's just-dawning nightlife and perusing chef Ty Sayles' three-course dinner menu. I quickly realized that an elegant meal at The Berkeley doesn't have to be reserved for tax-return celebrations.

OK, so you can't sample locally sourced creations, such as filet mignon with prosciutto, fennel and caraway seeds (\$27) or yellowfin tuna au poivre (\$24), for the same price as a diner's blue-plate special, but considering it's easy to drop half a month's rent at many fine-dining establishments, three expertly prepared courses for \$39 shouldn't be overlooked.

As low lighting warmed the cherry-colored walls and white table linens, it became apparent that my date and I weren't the only ones unaware of this deal. Save for three other couples, the dining room was empty.

However, this didn't stop our waiter from offering us the most proper table service, allowing us ample time to peruse the wine list (\$24-\$120) and menu, then arriving just in time to make quiet suggestions.

We decided to try a three-course dinner -- scallops wrapped in prosciutto, a surf'n'turf with New York strip and blackened shrimp and bourbon bread pudding -- as well as an appetizer of steamed shrimp with sweet red and yellow peppers (\$9) and chef Ty's signature crab cakes (\$28).

After our drinks were served, I was impressed by the salmon ceviche amuse-bouche, a bite-sized hors d'oeuvre meant to excite the palate. Ever since the fine-dining powerhouse 1 North Belmont closed, I've been hard-pressed to find such a proper beginning to a meal.

The scallops were perfectly cooked and accented by a delicately tangy sweet and sour sauce. Crisp strips of prosciutto added saltiness and crunch.

Large and plump, the shrimp were succulent alone. However, the freshly steamed red and yellow peppers needed a more pungent herb than parsley to produce the pizzazz I'd desired.

Between courses, we were presented with a refreshing strawberry mango soup as a palate cleanser.

Flaunting juiciness and char, the strip was wonderful. Each bite sang with the natural deliciousness of a good cut of meat and a deft hand in seasoning, making the lightly blackened shrimp an excellent pairing. Accompanying wild rice had a hint of chicken stock but was otherwise forgettable.

While not jumbo lump meat, the two crab cakes were baseball-sized, a more-than-generous portion. For such a ubiquitous entrée, the cakes should have stood out more, although sweet corn cream sauce was a pleasing accent. Briny Victory Farms greens gave the dish a comforting Southern note.

Topped with fresh blueberries and raspberries, the bourbon bread pudding was large enough to split. The bread was hearty, acting like a sponge for all the sugary bourbon goodness. Our eyes crossed with bliss.

Keep an eye out for special events, such as tonight's five-course dinner paired with Barbourville wines. With events such as this as well as an excellent prix fixe menu, The Berkeley is the perfect place for an elegant yet not necessarily wallet-assaulting night on the town.

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*Freelance writer and graphic designer Dana Craig has been reviewing restaurants for The Times-Dispatch since 2004. The Times-Dispatch pays for the meals on her unannounced visits to restaurants. Contact her at [dana@timesdispatch.com](mailto:dana@timesdispatch.com). Follow her at <http://twitter.com/danacraigoutd>.*

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