

SHOWTIME

DINING

★★★★ = EXCELLENT ★★★ = GOOD ★★ = FAIR ★ = POOR

S3 ★★★½

Small plates, big impact on Fort Lauderdale Beach

At once moderate and luxe, S3 is another standout from The Restaurant People.

By John Tanasychuk
STAFF WRITER

A dozen years ago, there weren't many places in Fort Lauderdale where I wanted to eat.

It seemed like a town that loved chains, Old World Italian joints and tired seafood restaurants standing on their last legs. Much of the old is still around, but the Fort Lauderdale restaurant scene has undergone a remarkable transformation.

Just look at S3 inside the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort. The trio behind this ocean-side beauty — Tim Petrillo, Peter Boulukos and Alan Hooper, owners of The Restaurant People — upended the visual landscape of Fort Lauderdale a few years back when they built their VIBE nightclub with its provocative pillars on Las Olas Boulevard. They were pioneers in the entertainment district known as Himmarshee Village, where they still operate Tarpon Bend.

But S3 — which stands for sun, surf and sand — represents something bigger. It nods to Fort Lauderdale's glamorous past with its warm lighting and luxe walnut and teak finishes. But children wouldn't be out of place for an early dinner, and you'll be fine wearing shorts having drinks around the fire pit. The fire pit, along with the deep orange and red interior colors, has become a kind of signature for The Restaurant People. But don't compare S3 to their downtown Fort Lauderdale YOLO. YOLO is more about steaks and chops and doing business. At S3, the small plates menu is best enjoyed between people who love to share food.

S3 has a fine executive chef named Chris Miracolo, who most recently put Max's Harvest in Delray Beach on the map. But his resume includes an early stint helping to open Tarpon Bend back in '99. His commitment to fresh ingredients is everywhere on the menu. I've been eating a lot of corn



Grilled octopus with gigande beans and salsa verde.

GREG SCHNEIDER / COURTESY

S3

Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort, 505 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd., Fort Lauderdale 954-523-7873

S3Restaurant.com

Cuisine: Eclectic

Cost: Moderate-expensive

Hours: Lunch and dinner daily;

Sunday brunch

Reservations: Suggested

Credit cards: All major

Bar: Full service

Sound level: Conversational

Outside smoking: No

For kids: High chairs, boosters,

menu

Wheelchair accessible: Yes

Parking: \$5 valet, meters or hotel garage



BARRY GROSSMAN PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY

The fire pit and view of the ocean from S3.

this summer, but nothing like his weirdly wonderful skewered chunks of Zellwood corn (\$5), covered in chili aioli and queso cojita. I thought I was eating good old fashioned Russian dressing for a minute.

While you're checking over the menu, order something from the

Snacks section. Crispy tomato bread (\$4) is an updated bruschetta with grated tomato, olive oil and manchego that takes its cue from Catalan pan con tomate. The sushi section of the menu is in the capable hands of Songphon Rawangphan, who makes a remarkable, almost sweet, Thai tuna roll

(\$14) with avocado, coconut, macadamia and soy paper.

The Wood Fired menu section features expertly grilled octopus (\$13) served with meaty Gigande beans and salsa verde, a perfect trio of textures. Brisket sliders (\$9) are tender and served South Carolina style with mustard barbecue sauce

and sweet chow chow. I loved the simple grilled Romaine (\$9) with pecorino, lemon, bits of prosciutto and white bean. Japanese eggplant (\$7) with miso sake glaze and sesame seemed bland next to all of these flavors.

Miracolo's mac & cheese (\$10) isn't the usual gooey, breadcrumb-crusted affair. His gets its big flavor from smoked gouda. Short ribs (\$15), served with black pepper spaetzle, are nicely braised in tomato and somehow almost lean tasting. I don't love the Vietnamese chicken wings (\$10). They're not crispy enough, and I want the drummette and the wingette separated. I don't want anything to do with a wing tip that isn't crisp.

Thankfully, warm towels are brought after our chicken wings, just as they were offered when we first sat down. Service, by the way, is professional and friendly, but the servers need more support. There are food runners, but apparently no bussers. Successful small plates restaurants need to be constantly on top of clearing dishes.

S3's desserts include a very good chocolate layer cake (\$8) that has an old-fashioned quality with its cream frosting. There's a new-fangled but simple compressed melon and macerated fruit concoction (\$8) and Icky Sticky Toffee Pudding (\$8) that we expected to be denser and stickier. This one's steamed.

I swear every S3 seat — 220 inside and 75 on the patio — faces the ocean. There are oval tables near the front where three can seat comfortably, all with a view. In booths, guests sit facing north and south so they have views of the ocean and the kitchen.

The Restaurant People spent \$4 million and 19 months transforming a spot that sat empty for six years after the Hilton opened. Construction took so long because they had to be mindful of hotel guests and noise.

But I give the hotel owner credit for tapping local restaurateurs instead of outsiders. And I thank The Restaurant People for bringing the splendid yet moderately priced S3 to our beach.

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