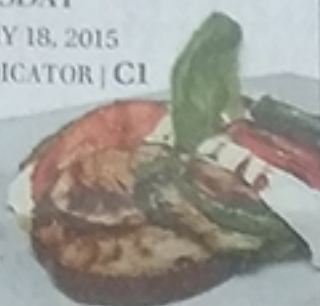


Valley FOOD

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 18, 2015
THE VINDICATOR | C1



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~ Tara — A Country Inn ~

FIDDLE-DEE-DELICIOUS



From left to right, American lamb rack, grass-fed beef filet mignon, Chilean sea bass, pecan-crusted salmon and Portobello mushroom with artichokes.

CLARK, PA.

WHEN YOU STEP through the grand, Grecian-columned entrance of Tara — A Country Inn (just north of Hermitage), you step into an atmosphere of opulence and old world charm.

Inspired by the classic novel and film "Gone With the Wind," Tara is renowned for its luxurious overnight accommodations and Southern hospitality.

But even if you aren't an overnight guest in one of Tara's gorgeous "Gone With the Wind"-themed rooms, you can still enjoy a slice of its unique brand of decadence by dining in Ashley's Gourmet Dining room or at Stonewall's Tavern.

I was fortunate enough to spend an evening as a dinner guest at Stonewall's Tavern, and it was truly a marvelous experience.

Stonewall's is located in Tara's lower level and features hand-hewn beams, rustic stone walls and a crackling fireplace. It's most popular for its steaks and seafood.

But before even taking my first bite of fare, I was in love with Stonewall's classy yet casual atmosphere

and the careful attention to details. The glowing fireplace, the heavy pewter goblets that made each sip of ice water seem even more deliciously cold, and the attentive servers dressed in old-timey tavern costumes made me feel as if I were enjoying the best of a bygone era.

Dinner began with a basket of fresh-baked breads, which were absolutely delicious when slathered with the establishment's signature honey-flavored butter.

Next came a trio of appetizers from both the Stonewall's menu and the Ashley's menu: An Amish beet and bleu cheese tart with red frisse and braised pistachios; a pea-and-leek mascarpone ravioli with lemon garlic cream and wilted spinach; and a Southern-style crab cake with wilted greens and jalapeno mayonnaise.

The beet tart was mild yet tangy, with delicate layers of pastry and a fresh crowning of frisse. It was probably the most creative use of a beet I have ever seen.

FOOD:30

Rebecca
Nieminen



The peas in the pea-and-leek mascarpone ravioli were as tender as if they'd just been plucked from a springtime garden, and the wilted spinach also was perfectly tender and flavorful.

Being a seafood lover, I'm always partial to crab cakes, and this one was superb, with a crisp coating protecting soft, savory chunks of crab meat and a just enough zing in the jalapeno mayonnaise to add a pleasant zest.

It was clear to me after such a spectacular opening that Tara's Chef Shaun Delong, who studied at The Art Institute of Pittsburgh, deserved high praise and was likely going to deliver a very memorable meal.

I was 100 percent correct.

After the appetizers I sampled two salads — Stonewall's traditional chopped salad with mixed greens, feta cheese and a light, tangy dressing, and a very unusual and exceptional spinach bacon salad.

The spinach salad features onions and bacon that have been

caramelized with orange juice and red wine vinegar and is surprisingly sweet and hearty.

Next I sampled five of Stonewall's and Ashley's most popular main courses.

First came the American lamb rack with eggplant puree, mushrooms, bibb lettuce, sweet peas and demi-glace. The lamb was mild, tender and flavorful — the best I have ever tasted.

Second came a pairing of Chilean sea bass and grass-fed beef with smoked tomato broth, cannellini beans and mushroom gouda pirogi.

If you've never had Chilean sea bass make sure to add this meal to your bucket list. It is truly sublime — a rare, melt-in-your-mouth ocean treasure.

The grass-fed beef also was sublime — a standard by which all beef should be measured, and the mushroom gouda pirogi was positively scrumptious.

Just when I thought it couldn't

IF YOU GO

- **Where:** Tara — A Country Inn
- **Address:** 2844 Lake Road, Clark, PA 16113
- **Phone:** 800-782-2803, 724-962-3535
- **Online:** tara-inn.com

TARA

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get any better, I tasted the No. 3 entrée — a pecan-crusted salmon with spinach cream sauce.

Prepared to perfection, the flaky, flavorful salmon was served with a rich spinach cream sauce and adorned with a sprinkling of sweet pecans.

The final entree was a lovely baked portobello mushroom stuffed with artichokes, roasted red peppers and feta cheese, finished with basil pesto. Divine!

By this stage of the meal, I was pretty sure I had died and gone to culinary heaven, but the bliss wasn't quite over yet.

Because I have a serious sweet tooth, I was eagerly anticipating what Chef Delong would prepare for dessert.

Soon a plate arrived with three desserts: a slice of cake known as chocolate decadence; a wonderful white chocolate mousse served inside a pastry carefully and

whimsically crafted to resemble a swan; and a grand Kahlua whiskey torte.

Oh my, oh my. The chocolate decadence was perfectly named and a true slice of heaven for a chocoholic like myself. The white chocolate mousse was elegant and light, and the Kahlua whiskey torte, sinfully rich. What a perfect ending to a perfect meal!

After dinner I took a stroll through Tara's lavishly decorated interior and peeked into a few of its opulent guest rooms. The 27 rooms have been cleverly christened with "Gone With the Wind"-themed names such as Twelve Oaks, Fiddle Dee Dee, Belle's Boudoir and I'll Think About It Tomorrow.

What started as a feast for my palate then quickly became a feast for my eyes. At every turn I was greeted with something breathtaking and luxurious — jeweled Tiffany lamps, regal four-poster beds, sparkling chandeliers, glowing fireplaces and exquisite antiques.

The original portion of Tara dates to 1854, but over the years extensive additions have been made. Jim and Donna Winner established Tara as a country inn in 1986.

General Manager Bill Moore said people shouldn't assume that fine dining at Tara will be out of their price range.

"We have dinners on the Stonewall Tavern menu starting at \$18," he said.

Reservations are preferred at both Stonewall Tavern and Ashley's Gourmet Dining Room. Dinner at Ashley's is \$75 per person and a jacket and tie are required for men. Ashley's is open Friday and Saturday evenings only.

Reservations also are preferred for Tara's celebrated Sunday brunch, which is available from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is \$20.95 for adults, \$16.95 for seniors and \$12.95 for children.

The weekly brunch menu features Belgian waffles, prime rib and made-to-order crepes.