

Once Upon a Table

34 Main Street, Stockbridge, MA 01262

Phone: 413-298-3870

Web: <http://www.onceuponatablebistro.com/>

Visit: Tuesday, September 28, 2010

Profile

Cuisine: Contemporary Bistro

Meals Served: Lunch and Dinner

Reservations: Suggested (Especially Peak Seasons)

Payment: Cash, and Accepts Visa and MasterCard

Dress Code: Casual

Year Opened: 1999

Seating for: 30

Special Features:

- Locally Grown Ingredients
- Outside Seating (Weather Permitting)
- Beer and Wine
- Takeout Available

Hours: Mon thru Sun • 11AM - 3PM & 5PM - 9PM

Full Dinner for Two with Drinks and Dessert (including Tax and Tip): ~\$120 • Basic Dinner for Two (including Tax and Tip): ~\$65

Food: ★★★★★ Atmosphere: ★★★ Service: ★★★★★
(Five Stars Maximum)

It was a dark and stormy night—a Tuesday, in fact—when we decided to go out for dinner. There are a couple of local restaurants we've wanted to try for some time, but sadly, none are open Tuesdays. A Wednesday thru Sunday schedule seems to be common in the Berkshires. As luck would have it, that hurdle brought us to *Once Upon a Table*—which fortunately is open Tuesdays.

7:15 PM Main Street parking in Stockbridge, during leaf-peeping season, was pleasantly easy. The *mew* (or pedestrian alley) hosting the restaurant was eerily quiet as well. To our surprise, however, the dining room was full. Thankfully, I called ahead, and after a five minute wait—while standing off to the side trying to take up as little space as possible—a table was vacated and quickly made ready for us.

The dining room is simple, functional, and somewhat bland. The seating is comfortable, albeit a bit tight. Decorations, scant. (Side note: I highly suspect that a summer dining experience here would present a more open, comfortable feel.) What made this mediocre atmosphere something much more, however, were the hostess and waitress. A genuine greeting and welcoming smile trumps all in the food service industry.

Admittedly, the menu choices are not vast. But the bases were well covered. And, what was offered seemed delicious enough. Our anticipation was definitely building.

As the weather turns colder, soup always seems the perfect remedy, so we each ordered their Tomato Parmesan Soup. Always wanting to maintain some degree of a healthy balance—knowing already I would be ordering dessert—I also opted for the

house salad. For the main course, Tereza (my beautiful dining partner for life) ordered the Seared Scallop entrée from the Specials menu; I ordered my oft-favorite from the standard menu, Roast Duck.

Though not exactly wine connoisseurs, we both appreciate a drink with dinner. The drink options were plentiful enough and offered choices to satisfy all but the most discriminating diner. As of late, we've both become Prosecco fans. The Prosecco choice available did not disappoint.

Without much wait, our Tomato Parmesan soup was served, each accompanied by a warm multigrain roll (baked locally). As a lover of all things bread, I can unequivocally state that the rolls were delicious—I heartily ate both (Tereza is gluten-free). And when dipped into the perfectly warm soup, heaven. The Tomato Parmesan soup was sweet, creamy, and flavorful to a degree I rarely find in such a soup.

Next came the salad. Although Tereza originally expressed no interest in a salad of her own, this one was large enough to share. Unfortunately, the salad experience failed to live up to the reputation that the soup had built. In short, it lacked flavor. The mesclun greens were fresh, the grape tomatoes firm, but the house vinaigrette barely lit the tongue, and the pecans added little to the taste or texture. This menu item needs to be reworked by the chef.

Now for the main course. Presentation was very good. In fact, Tereza's seared scallops looked so good, that I reached across the table for a bite before I had even touched my duck. Thankfully, taste lived up to and even exceeded appearance. The large scallops were cooked perfectly, with flavor and texture to match. Delicious! Happily, my half roast duck was more of the same—cooked and flavored perfectly. If forced to muster any criticism of the duck it would be that I prefer a crispier skin.

Accompanying our scallops and duck, we were both served mashed potatoes and green beans. The mashed potatoes were good, but not great; and the green beans were, well, green beans. Both are staples of many restaurants, but there is some room for improvement there.

For dessert I had the Crème Brûlée and Tereza the Flourless Chocolate Cake. Both are made in-house. The flourless chocolate cake was definitively chocolaty without being overbearingly sweet. Portioning was good as well. Sadly, for me the crème brûlée was a real disappointment to top off an otherwise superb meal. Those who know my own cooking know my signature dessert is crème caramel—so I consider myself somewhat of an expert of custard-based desserts. Unfortunately, their version of crème brûlée was more like a room-temperature vanilla ice cream and whipped cream concoction with a hard sugary top.

If I haven't already made it clear, the wait staff were a pleasure—friendly and attentive without being overbearing. Overall, the food was really very good. Tereza and I will definitely return for more.