

The Talented Mister Collins

I've held hundreds of press dinners. Hundreds of them. Last night, I attended my first as a guest. The MS (main squeeze) received an invite to try out the new Mister Collins restaurant at the swanky One Bal Harbour and I was his plus one. Little did they know, I'd be on the blog about it first.

We drove across the Broad Causeway as the gray afternoon turned into an evening sky heavy with mood. The humidity was palpable. Driving through Bal Harbour is one of my fave walks through history. The old mixed with the new. The 1950's sea-front apartment buildings overshadowed by the modern-day towers of condo-hotels. The Bal Harbour Shoppes getting their beauty rest until the morning when their finest will be open and on display once again. Aaah Bal Harbour, how fond I am of you.

Where Collins Avenue reaches the bridge to Haulover Beach, is where you'll find One Bal Harbour. Sitting adjacent to a famous Miami Beach location, the Harbour House, which was completely gutted and rebuilt by the Related Group, One Bal Harbour is a fancy place to see and be seen. Arriving at the valet on a busy day is like being in a Beverly Hills parade of decadence. The cars are ridiculous. Bentleys, Ferraris, you name it. Regardless, the valet's don't seem to mind my 2010 Ford SUV one bit, which is nice. They did ask when we arrived however "Are you here for Mister Collins?" which could have been because of the car, or because they'd been groomed for the evening?

We were greeted at the front door and ushered in. "Do you have a reservation?" I think was code for - are you here for the press dinner? "Yes," we answered "but we're early so let's sit at the bar a while." Our reservation was for 9pm but we arrived about 7:45. (When a girl has a babysitter, there's no time to lose...) We sat at the modern bar, with panoramic views of both the Intracoastal and beach. Our bartender, who looked like a French Colombian Joe Jonas, quickly took our order, and paid very careful attention. Nice place already. He brought us some of the house-made soft pretzels to snack on. They were warm and doughy with crusts of buttered salt. Delicious, but filling. So if you order these, share them. They came with bullets of spicy mustard, and cheese sauce. The mustard rocked.



Yummy, but sooo filling

After drinks, we were placed at our table. Early. Which was awesome. A somber, attractive room of muted colors and textures awaited. On a clear night, the view would have been spectacular. We were advised that an appetizer and dessert were already suggested for us, and we'd just have to fill in the blanks. I'm only going to talk about the food I tasted, as the MS has his own opinion on his food and I couldn't begin to understand or communicate that. I started with the "mandatory" spring roll and it was fresh and delicious. To be honest, that and a salad would have been just fine for me. The spring roll was not fried or steamed, more of a summer roll. Fresh mint and house-made peanut sauce were the spikes of flavor needed. It was great. I had one of the MS's JUMBO shrimp and that was hearty and delicious as well.



Spring forward!

My entree was Seared Diver Scallops with farm-fresh "creamed" corn and lemony grilled asparagus. That was lovely. Very light, dainty pairing. The entree could have been shared. The corn was the most impressive thing on the plate, but overall the entree was satisfying. The MS had NY Strip steak which came with a side of Crab Mac n Cheese.



yum

For dessert, the "mandatory" choice was Coconut & Corn ice cream with mini Madelines. I'm not a coconut fan, so my expectations were slim. MS ordered the chocolate choice, some sort of S'more cake with torched marshmallow creme on top. He loved it, minus the marshmallow. I actually tasted the Coconut & Corn ice cream and warm mini Madeline cookies and I was surprised at how much I liked it. Creamy and smooth, very mild taste with sugared grilled corn pieces on top. Very Top Chef. Very good. Surprising.



Can I torch your mallows?

Overall, the place is nice. It has neighborhood-friendly food, sorta pricey, but good. The service is good, and it should be. It's in danger of becoming a dreaded "hotel restaurant" without major local outreach. Which, I imagine is part of what last night was about. I saw newscasters, food writers, social doyennes, all gathered in the dining room for the dinner. What I would have liked, is more info on the place. What the food philosophy is. A chef or two come out and say hello. Some tips on what they're doing there.

I respect the fact that they wanted the media to come in and experience on their own, I really do. I would've just like a little more info. If you're adventurous to try this spot, here's the recipe in which I think you'll be successful: Two people – one app, one salad, one entree and as much wine/beer/whatever. Speaking of beer, props to Mister Collins for featuring FLA beer Monk in the Trunk and another fave craft brew Magic Hat No. 9. Bravo.



Corny and Delish