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SYLVIA RECTOR

## Upscale Iridescence debuts a less pricey, more approachable menu

BY SYLVIA RECTOR • FREE PRESS RESTAURANT CRITIC • JULY 30, 2009

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The luxurious Iridescence at MotorCity Casino Hotel is the latest top metro Detroit dining destination to lower prices and adjust its culinary style to attract more business as the restaurant industry endures its worst year since 1981.

Executive chef Don Yamauchi's newly introduced menu is designed to put average entrée prices at \$25, down from the upper \$30s, and to be less intimidating to average diners.

"We are taking a more approachable stance," he said. "We don't want this to be just a special-occasion restaurant. People will still use it for its view and ambience ... but in price structure ... we want to make sure people can eat here more than once a year."

Under former chef de cuisine Adam Hightower, who left after Yamauchi arrived in June, the menu featured unusual, high-end ingredients and distinctive preparations.

Now dishes like Hightower's memorable \$32 cinnamon-lavender pheasant have been replaced with more basic ones such as Chicken Two Ways -- a chicken potpie and cinnamon-roasted chicken breast for \$18.

Items on the new menu will sound more familiar to diners, Yamauchi says, but they still will be more interesting and memorable than guests expect. "We want them to say, 'Gosh, I want to go back for that salmon, for that chicken.' You go back because of the dish."

So the potpie is scented with truffle oil, for example, and the pan-seared salmon is marinated in a little sugar, soy sauce and chiles and served with miso butter.

Yamauchi has also brought back a few items -- including a 2-pound lobster tail -- from years before when the restaurant was downstairs in the original casino. Casino patrons missed some of those dishes, he said.

The changes at Iridescence -- as well as other restaurants' format changes and aggressive price cuts -- come amid news that restaurant industry traffic nationwide declined 2.6% in the spring quarter, compared with the same period last year.

The report by the NPD Group, a leading market research company, said it was the sharpest drop in 28 years. The declines in visits were steepest in households with children, the report said.

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Sandra Smith

Pan-seared salmon garnished with sweet corn and fava beans (\$27) is one of the new, less-expensive menu options at Iridescence at MotorCity Casino Hotel.

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