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DECEMBER 16, 2012 AT 1:00 AM

Molly Abraham: Review: Former Northville service station reborn Garage Grill and Fuel Bar becomes a new dining destination

MOLLY ABRAHAM 4 COMMENTS



From left: Garage's Partners Mark Evasic, his brother Bill Evasic, and Mike Bageris. (Ricardo Thomas/ The Detroit News)

Since opening its doors a little more than two weeks ago, Garage Grill and Fuel Bar has become a popular dinner destination in the attractive town of Northville. So much so that on its first weekend of serving its contemporary American menu, the wait for a prime-time table was 90 minutes.

Not bad for a former Gulf service station with sweeping lines that echo its '40s origin. The redo of the building in the heart of Northville's downtown district, a project that took more than two years to complete, is a triumph of style and creative re-use.

And best of all, the well-prepared food lives up to the upbeat and colorful setting.

There's a wealth of eye-catching detail, from a winding mural that manages to include highlights of both Northville and downtown Detroit, dozens of framed black-and-white photos of vintage cars and the people who kept them running, and a kitchen sheathed by an almost floor-to-ceiling wall of glass. You can see what's going on in there from many of the tables in the airy, high-ceilinged dining room.

In charge of that sleek kitchen is executive chef Steve Siekierzynski, who has written an appealing menu that fits on a single page of crisp white paper with the wine list on the back. While there are certain dishes that seem requisite on contemporary menus these days — crisp calamari, sliders, fish tacos and margherita and pepperoni pizzas, for instance — there are also creative additions that give the menu its own personality.

Those sliders, for instance, are made with choice beef, caramelized onion and fontina cheese, all pulled together with red wine butter, and the fish in the tacos is mahi-mahi with lime aioli and jasmine rice. As for the pizzas, they are on notably thin, crisp crusts topped with fresh ingredients including housemade sausage and a variety of cheeses from Boursin to fontina.

The a la carte choices include a robust salad which teams that suddenly hot item — kale — with pears, toasted almonds, gorgonzola cheese and adds a surprise, pan-roasted shrimp. Smoked pork loin gets a brown sugar rub, and it is served with sweet potato fries and Brussels sprouts that temper the sweetness. It's one of 11 entrees that include a couple of pastas and simply lovely panko chicken topped with arugula and fresh lemon vinaigrette; and, of course, there is a steak, but just one, an 8-ounce herb-marinated filet.

Although each dish is well-garnished, there are some sides, including pan-roasted redskins, spinach and asparagus.

The chef is also in charge of the desserts; and although he's modest about it, calling them "chef's desserts, not pastry chef's desserts," they are tempting.

Diners have been raving about the banana sticks, which are macadamia nut-coated bananas with rum sauce and ice cream, bread pudding made with croissants and embellished with crème anglaise and pistachio ice cream as well as sea salt-sprinkled caramel pudding with a touch of chocolate and peanut brittle.

Need another reason to make the trek to Northville? The price structure, by today's standards, is noticeably affordable, and service is pleasant and informal as befits the setting. Proprietors Mike Bageris and Bill Evasic can take a well-deserved bow for a project that was completed when they lured chef Siekierzynski away from Assaggi Bistrot.

Another winning factor is the separate area for carryout orders. Yes, they seem to have thought of everything.

Garage Grill & Fuel Bar

202 W. Main, Northville

Call: (248) 924-3367

Web: www.garagenorthville.com

Rating: 3 1/2

Hours: Dinner 5-10 p.m. Sun.-Thurs., 5-11 p.m. Fri.-Sat. Lunch will be added soon.

Prices: Appetizers \$6-\$11, soups and salads \$4-\$18, sandwiches \$11-\$14, pizzas \$9-\$13, dinner entrees \$16-\$27, housemade desserts \$6

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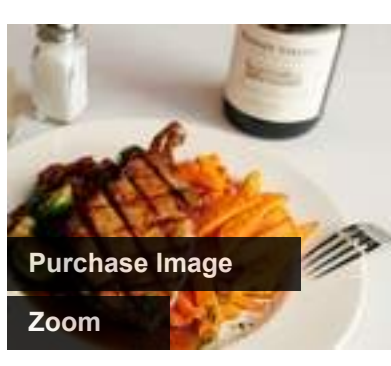
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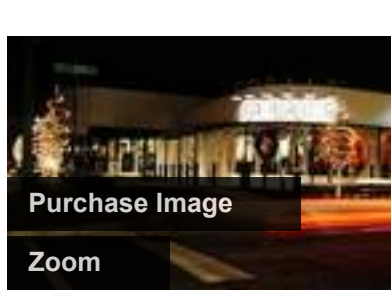
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Lightly smoked pork loin rubbed with brown sugar, accompanied by sweet ... (Ricardo Thomas/ The Detroit News)



The new Garage Grill and Fuel Bar in Northville. (Ricardo Thomas/ The Detroit News)



Rena Corum and her husband Brian Mayville of Northville are served a 2011 ... (Ricardo Thomas/ The Detroit News)

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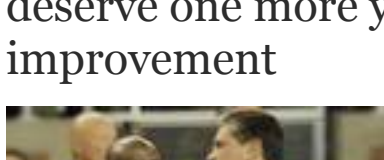
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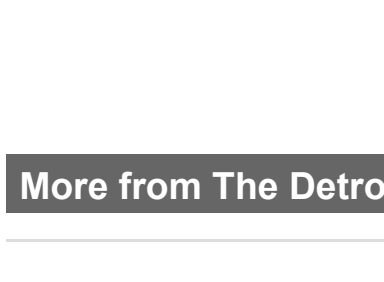
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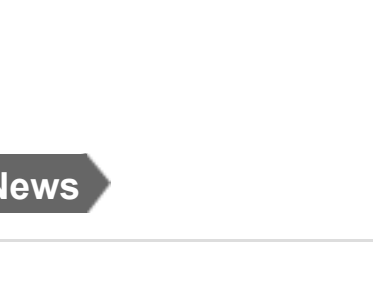
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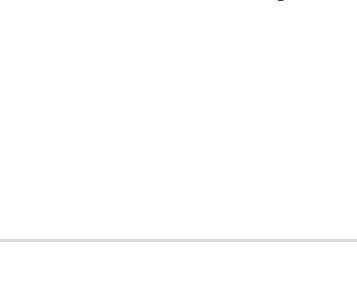
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