

# San Diego Grill brings west coast attitude

By Dotti Bernhard  
For Hometown News

San Diego Grill is a casual eatery for which, judging from the steady stream of diners who were there the evening we visited, is exactly what folks are clamoring.

The vibe is relaxed California with an artfully executed exposed duct ceiling, mellow shades of green tiling and white brick on the walls, and a softly lit ambiance punctuated with subdued pendant lighting that picks up the muted avocado and tangerine tones reminiscent of the waterfront metropolis that is the establishment's namesake.

San Diego Grill is the brainchild of restaurateurs Jill and Sunny Smith, who also created the popular Sunset

Grille in Winter Park and Monterey Grill and Malibu Beach Grill in Port Orange. They are not from the west coast, but, according to Jill, "We spent a lot of time in California and were impressed with the quality and freshness of the cuisine. We studied everything from menus and preparations to the way the produce was nurtured in the fields. We brought the best of what we saw back to the east coast."

Reflecting a growing trend, there is no walk in freezer on the premises so the menu is filled with fresh never frozen seafood, poultry and meat. Locally sourced produce is used in the salads, salsas and guacamole, which are dressed without artificial additives, flavorings or colors. Two soup selections are made from scratch daily.

When my companion and I visited,



Photo by Dotti Bernhard

Lightly blackened Mahi steak, Parmesan mashed potatoes, and corn, black bean and shredded Jack salsa is one of many delectable entrees at San Diego Grill at The Pavilion at Port Orange.

our server first brought us each a cinnamon bun, a complimentary standard opening to every meal. They were warm and right out of the oven so we couldn't resist munching them while we waited for the first course.

We started off with the zucchini appetizer, which was a genuine surprise. It was unusually cut lengthwise, breaded with panko and flash cooked to maintain crispness and flavor. The accompanying dipping sauce had just the right tinge of horseradish flavor.

Next my companion opted for a broccoli cheddar soup that was creamy, expertly seasoned and was filled with tender florets instead of the coarser stalks often used in this dish. For my part, the white chicken Chile soup was a deeply flavorful broth with tender shredded chicken and beans and was expertly seasoned with cumin and other complimentary spices. It was delicious.

My guest then chose a nicely portioned hand-breaded fish and shrimp platter. The ample serving completely satisfied his hunger as well as his taste

buds. I decided on the catch of the day, Mahi Mahi, which was cut on the thin side and gently blackened, which sealed in the moistness and delicate flavor. The parmesan mashed potatoes partnered admirably with the fish. A freshly made salsa expertly married the flavors of corn, black beans and red onion and its consistency was just crunchy enough to offset the addition of shredded jack cheese.

San Diego Grill's menu runs the gamut from gourmet burgers and sandwiches, salads, popular "bowls" served over your choice of brown or white rice, chicken, steak, ribs and seafood.

Local Port Orange resident Shirl Petrucci was dining for the second night in the same week that we were there. "I've always experienced good food and service here," she told us. "And you can't beat the price." Many three-course meal selections were

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