

A Taste of Atlanta's Rising Restaurant Scene

Seafood and Soul

Though owner Raymond Jones' wife's zodiac sign played a role in the naming of his new restaurant and jazz club, the first few months of business have proven that success is written in the stars for Pisces Seafood & Jazz. A swanky yet subtle sign in neon blue announces its presence to passersby, and its prime location on Old Milton Parkway has been beckoning a crowd to this sophisticated locale with smooth music and superior food since it opened in February.

The restaurant's interior achieves a variety of atmospheres to suit your every mood: A small seating area near the entrance features a wall of windows that make for bright, cheery daytime dining — great for Sunday jazz brunches — while stacked-stone fireplaces act as bookends in the main dining room, evoking a cozy feel. A private banquet room on one side of the restaurant is equipped with all the necessities for a corporate meeting, but it's not all work and no play; a bar, isolated on the other side, offers a good time and its own menu, which combines typical bar fare with gourmet-style treats like mussels *diablo* and crabmeat-stuffed mushrooms. Jazz greats like Frank Sinatra and Nina Simone make an appearance on the specialty drinks menu in the form of namesake martinis and cocktails, such as "I Did It My Way" (gin, limoncello and honey) and "Sunday in Savannah" (Georgia peach vodka, lemonade and iced tea), and Pisces' unique wine list focuses on organic labels from small vineyards.

Whether it's the drinks or the mellow music, the laid-back atmosphere at Pisces on a weeknight is contagious, even encouraging camaraderie between patrons. When a man from the table next to mine struck up a conversation

to praise the restaurant and offer menu advice, I was much obliged — the tuna, his recommendation, was phenomenal. Order it as an appetizer (cool, diced ahi tuna topped with avocado and a tangy Asian spice), or opt for the entrée, with wasabi mash potatoes, Japanese vegetables, pineapple relish and teriyaki glaze.

And that's only one of many excellent options from the restaurant's list of oceanic fare. Chef Specialities include the Shrimp Trio, with grilled barbecue shrimp, coconut shrimp and shrimp scampi atop sweet potato mash and prosciutto-wrapped asparagus, and the Almond Crusted Grouper with mushroom pilaf, fresh mango salsa and Chambord raspberry sauce. Or, order from the *a la carte* menu to choose from meats such as tilapia, grouper and filet mignon; sauces such as Asian, lemon caper butter and red wine demi glaze; and a variety of sides — the options are endless. And even if you're counting carbs, the bread assortment, made in-house and served as a precursor to your surf or turf feast, is worth the indulgence (grab the one with the dill).



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Pisces' Surf and Turf entrée

Of course, the exceptional food is only half of the equation at Pisces Seafood & Jazz, and customers will enjoy soulful entertainment from a stage in the main dining room during each and every visit. Whereas weeknights afford the opportunity to chill out with contemporary jazz, and blues on Mondays, things begin to heat up as the workweek tapers off and the weekend rolls in. On Friday and Saturday nights, Pisces morphs into a hip and swinging jazz club, with a little R&B thrown into the contemporary jazz performances — don't be surprised if the night's entertainer wanders into the audience and encourages diners to sing. Jones' experience as an accomplished jazz musician allows him to tap into a pool of local talent and deliver top-notch entertainment to the suburbs, where he saw the need for a fine dining establishment that offered live jazz on a nightly basis. "We wanted to bring all points north," he said. Now that's what we like to hear!

— Reviewed by Bre Edmonds

Pisces Seafood & Jazz
4120 Old Milton Pkwy.
Alpharetta
770-475-0057
www.piscesseafoodandjazz.com

An Argentinean Feast

Despite the number of times I had driven past the strip mall housing Pampas Steakhouse and seen its red neon sign, I hardly took a second glance. Now, after a recent visit, I'm kicking myself for not visiting the Argentinean steakhouse sooner. This isn't what I envisioned of a strip mall restaurant with a red neon sign. No, from the moment I walked through the heavy wooden doors, I knew I would be having a meal to remember.

Entering a circular dining room of warm woods and wrought iron, intimate booths encircled a central dining area with views into the kitchen and a magnificently large and ornate yet simple wrought iron chandelier centered in between a dropped ceiling. As I took in the ambience, a friend and her husband called out to me. Seems they've recently discovered this gem of a six-year-old steakhouse, and they raved about the dishes my husband and I "must" try.

Unlike Brazilian steakhouses, which serve up meat on a platter after you raise cards to be brought more selections, Argentinean steakhouses are just like American steakhouses, but with different cuts of succulent beef. Here, our server brought over a platter of raw beef to show us just what each cut of meat looks like before we ordered. From the Brick fillet to the Golf Club special cut of ribeye ordered off the menu, our server explained how each cut would bring out different combinations of juice and marbling. Owing the steakhouse from which it gets its meat — they happen to supply steaks to Atlanta faves like Chops — Pampas gets the first and finest selections. I chose the Ojode Bife, a 14-ounce ribeye, to ensure I'd get more flavor from the marbling I could see on my cut of meat, adding an *au poivre* sauce from the choice of cooking methods, while my husband opted for the El Gaucho, a 24-ounce bone-in ribeye, simply grilled.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RAISHEL JUHAN



Pampas Steakhouse