

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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It was Restaurant Week in Dallas and I was on safari for the perfect cut of beef.

Dallas/Fort Worth eateries that participate in the annual event, sponsored by KRLD radio, offer a special \$35 *pre fixe* dinner menu three-course meal, with \$7 benefitting local food banks.

Some restaurants offer “The Cadillac Lunch Experience” for \$25 *pre fixe* 3-course lunch, with \$5 going to the food banks.

It’s a win-win-win deal.

Charities receive a huge windfall to ease the stress of funding cuts. Restaurants are booked weeks in advance and attract a whole new clientele with the great pricing. The dining public has a chance to sample places normally outside their budget/comfort zone.

The week-long event has been such a success that many of the participating restaurants have extended their special rates through Sept. 2.

Pat and Trice Lawrence joined Mr. Mathews and me for a trip to the Dallas Museum of Art and a movie at the Angelika in Mockingbird Station. Dinner was our last stop on what was an art-filled day.

We booked a table for 6 p.m. at Nick & Sam’s, one of Dallas’ premiere (read exclusive/expensive) steakhouses.



Normally, a 6 p.m. reservation finds us almost alone in the dining room, but when we turned into the parking lot at the corner of Maple and Wolf, the Mercedes, Volvos and Cadillacs were already queued up. A Lotus Espirit was valeted in a safe, out of the way corner. Clearly, a lot of other red meat fans hunters decided to arrive early.

The tallest girl I’ve ever seen took our information and passed us off to another amazon, who led us to a table in the main dining room.

Nick & Sam’s sleek design screams luxury. The dove gray walls, high beamed ceilings and vibrant art work set an elegant, intimate mood.

One end of the dining space opens onto a huge kitchen. Open kitchens are a trendy feature in newer establishments. Being able to watch staff prepare the food is entertaining and interesting. As the restaurant filled up, the kitchen at Nick & Sam’s found another gear, proving this was not their first rodeo. It was an impressive show of culinary finesse.

We were incredibly lucky to be seated at a table assigned to Mike Nguyen, who explained our options for the evening.

For appetizers, the chef offered choices between a California kale, Mandarin oranges, ricotta salad with a black pepper lemon vinaigrette dressing or the soup of the day, which was a delightful chicken and corn chowder.

Entree choices were a beef tenderloin with tarragon butter sauce or a miso-glazed salmon with Singapore style noodles.

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Sides were creamed spinach and garlic mashed potatoes.

The restaurant is famous for its lobster mac 'n' cheese (\$15). We were not disappointed. The dish is buttery, creamy, cheesy and full of delicious lobster bits, and there was enough left over for an upscale doggie bag. No plastic sacks at Nick & Sam's. No, sir. Our take home containers were placed in elegant paper shopping bags made of recycled materials.

We had a choice of a caramel apple bread pudding with vanilla creme Anglaise or flourless chocolate cake with cinnamon whipped cream and homemade raspberry preserves.

We ordered three tenderloins, all at various temperatures, and one salmon, well done – with my apologies to the chef, but that's the way Mr. Mathews prefers his fish. Mike didn't bat an eyelash, proving the guest is always right at Nick & Sam's.

In addition to fabulous aged beef, Nick & Sam's is famous for their extensive wine collection. From the moment you walk through the doors, you see bottles on shelves, in specially designed rooms and lining the walls of private dining spaces. It's pretty overwhelming if you're a novice like me. ("Wine for Dummies" would be over my head.)

Mike, however, removed all the stress out of wine selection.

He asked me several questions about what I liked and brought a most perfect, robust, oaky red for my approval.

He chose a Decoy 2010 cabernet sauvignon. At \$18 glass, it'll be a once-a-year treat, but it was tasted like liquid velvet.

As we were beginning the meal, Brian D. Knoy, the restaurant's sommelier (wine expert) dropped by to see if we were happy with Mike's suggestions. Knoy had just returned from a 3-day wine seminar at Las Colinas, where he said he learned a lot, despite having consumed a lot of vino. He offered his card and told us to call him if we ever had questions about what wine to purchase for home consumption. Now, that's customer service.

Can't say the salad was my favorite thing of the evening, but then kale is not on my everyday shopping list. The vinaigrette was light and spicy, but the mandarin oranges tasted like they came from a can and the kale was a little anemic.

Mr. Mathews had the chicken and corn chowder, which was densely delicious and surprisingly perfect, even on a hot August night.



I like my beef rare. At least that's what I thought until Tuesday night. What I really want is beef cooked "rare – warm," as opposed to "rare – cool."

Again, Mike knew exactly what questions to ask so the food that arrived at our table was exactly what I – and my palette – was expecting.

Dessert was delicious. The cake was dense and loaded with chocolate flavor.

Mr. Mathews declared the bread pudding, laden with apples, cinnamon and rich cream, "the best thing I've ever eaten." This is high praise from a guy whose motto is "the simpler the better."

As we progressed through dinner, the space began to fill. As people were seated and settled in, the noise level rose. By the time we left, the decibel level prohibited conversation.

By the time desserts arrived and coffee served, we stopped yelling across the table and relied on people watching.

Nick & Sam's is where the beautiful people of Dallas hang out. Looking around the room and into the handsome bar, it's obvious the young and the restless love this place. It's also a

Restaurant Week continues: Many Dallas eateries extend \$35 three-course pre fixe specials through Sept

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where business executives with huge expense accounts take their clients. The main dining room was full of tables of 10 men dressed like they stepped out of the pages of GQ.

Any doubt of this place's exclusivity is dispelled by one glance at the "regular" menu. Talk about sticker shock. The Porterhouse is, I think, \$125.

Our \$35 per person (plus the wine and extra mac 'n' cheese) was looking pretty good.

Nick and Sam's has been on my list for a long time. It did not disappoint. The service was impeccable. The wine pairing was spot on. While it's not in our budget for regular dinner, it is a most excellent place for special occasions, and will be on the list for next year's Restaurant Week.

Nick & Sam's, located at 3008 Maple Street (at the corner of Wolf) in Dallas is open from 4 p.m. (kitchen begins service at 5 p.m.) until midnight on Sunday through Thursday, and from 4 p.m. until 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. (bar) on Friday and Saturdays.

Find your favorite dining destination at <http://dfw.cbslocal.com/krlD-restaurant-week/>
Green and red listings indicate those who have extended their special offers through Aug. 26 (green) and Sept. 2 (red)



"We've been very, very busy this week," said server Andrew Derden, when I called Nick & Sam's to get hours of operation.

Reservations are absolutely required during Restaurant Week. Don't show up without one, especially at the more exclusive, popular places.

Nick & Sam's has extended their special \$35 menu through Sept. 2.

Contact information for Nick & Sam's is 214-871-7444 or www.nick-sams.com