

A Sigh of Relief in Gansett

By Laura Donnelly

(4/24/2008) As rumors float around town about P. Diddy, Donna Karan, and Ralph Lauren getting involved in the restaurant business, there was a welcome and communal sigh of relief to hear that the folks from Bostwick's on the Harbor had taken over the late Estia Cantina location in Amagansett. After a rapid and handsome renovation inside and out, Indian Wells Tavern is now open. From its first day, it has been packed.

Did you know you can get a fancy "call" cocktail for a mere \$10, a good burger for \$11, Chicken Milanese for \$15? In a town where steaks can reach the \$50 range and a \$32 prix fixe special is considered a bargain, this is a welcome change.

First the name. Indian Wells. For those who know or care, it immediately conjures up a picture, a feeling, the beach we know and love. Indian Wells Tavern (one-half of which is the old McKendry's) is a dark-wood-paneled bar and restaurant with pressed-tin ceilings, frosted-glass panels dividing the room, and exposed-brick walls with beautiful black-and-white photographs all around.

Upon being seated you get some J. Flats crackers with sun-dried tomato dip. A nice start. For appetizers we tried the fried pickle chips(!), Gansett Nachos, golden crisp calamari with fra diablo sauce, and the goat cheese fritters served with balsamic glaze.

The goat cheese fritters were very good — large medallions lightly breaded and fried. Piping hot and melty on the outside, still cool and creamy within. The fried pickle chips were hilarious and delicious. It is inconceivable to me that they can take a soggy pickle chip and crisp it up, but they do it. The pickles were on the underdone-still-fresh-cucumber side, quickly fried in batter and served with a caper aioli.

The golden crisp calamari was also good, but they should call the accompanying sauce marinara, because that's what it is. There was no devil in the fra diablo.

On several occasions we have tried the House Smoked St. Louis Ribs served with sweet potato fries and coleslaw. They were outstanding. Moist, smoky, slightly charred, and spicy, this may be the best item on the menu.

Other dishes we tried were the chicken pot pie, the chicken and skirt steak fajitas, and the burger. The chicken pot pie was good. It had a well-seasoned bechamel sauce, plenty of white meat and vegetables, and the topping was of a savory cobbler or biscuit dough, flecked with fresh herbs. The burger was just right, cooked to order and served with a mound of shoestring potatoes. The fajitas are billed as a specialty and they were excellent.

The chicken was even better than the skirt steak. My only gripe about this dish is that I wish the side portions of pico de gallo, guacamole, and sour cream were more generous. When we asked for more along with more tortillas, it was delivered immediately, at no additional charge.

Prices for appetizers and salads range from \$7 to \$14. Entrees cost \$11 to \$24.



Morgan McGivern

The new Indian Wells Tavern, can get busy. Our reviewer loved the ribs.

The service was friendly, helpful, hard-working, and harried. When we asked for a wine list, a waitress delivered a plastic-coated card listing wines by the glass. When the wine bottle was delivered and opened at the table, the waitress immediately recorked it and ran to the next table to deliver another item. Frankly, we were more amused than annoyed.

A busboy leapt to our rescue and catered to our every whim thereafter. I was slightly disappointed to see only one Long Island wine on the list, however.

There were three choices for dessert, and we were assured they were all made in-house. If three desserts are all they'll ever have on the menu, then these three particular choices will do just fine.

One was a retro-style chocolate pudding, nice and thick, topped with whipped cream and fresh raspberries. There was also a pear crumble and a blondie a la mode. The pear crumble was huge, enough for two people, and it had a great topping. The homemade blondie a la mode was also very good, topped with another generous sprinkling of fresh raspberries.

Indian Wells Tavern can get noisy. It was very busy every time I've been and the bar scene is jumpin'. It was nice to see families and young couples enjoying a night out that they know they can afford.

I was originally concerned about whether a restaurant so similar to Meeting House would do well when they're right across the street from each other, both serving pub grub. With a few other restaurants in the area sitting forlornly empty and for sale, and others charging way too much for the simplest of food, I believe there is room for two friendly, cozy "Cheers"-style restaurants.

Indian Wells, welcome to the neighborhood.