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DINING REVIEW | LONG ISLAND

Classics of the American Grill

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A Review of George Martin's Grillfire in Syosset



The dining room at George Martin's Grillfire.

KATHY KMONICEK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

You could look at the August opening of [George Martin's Grillfire](#) in Syosset as proof that the American dream still exists.

It was at this very site that 19-year-old Richard Cutler got his start in the restaurant business as a busboy. Twenty-seven years later, he is a co-owner of Grillfire, formerly known as Mim's, along with the man who hired him, George Korten.

Mr. Korten sold the original Mim's to Mr. Cutler five years after hiring him to bus tables. Mr. Cutler now also owns the current [Mim's in Roslyn](#) and [Mill Creek Tavern](#) in Bayville. Mr. Korten went on to build the [George Martin Group](#), a collection of restaurants that includes the Grillfire chain. The Grillfire formula is a proven winner, and the newest one in Syosset, with its bold beauty and masculine look, is no exception. (The others are in Merrick, Rockville Centre and Hanover, Md.)

Upon entering, diners see a hostess station on the right and a spacious bar on the left with glass tiles and a dramatic tin ceiling. In addition to the eight tall tables for two and three long booths in the bar area, there are six booths in the center of the restaurant, before the space widens in the back, defined by dark wood furniture, vibrant modern paintings and wood rafters. Throughout, stone and wood add to the masculine look.



A standout appetizer at George Martin's Grillfire is the zucchini linguine, in which thin strips of zucchini replace the pasta.



The restaurant's entrees include American grill classics like barbecue ribs.

The restaurant seems very popular and takes reservations only for parties of five or more. Go early or call 30 minutes ahead to be put on a wait list. The crowds and the hard surfaces (bare tables) make for a very noisy setting. But the staff proved up to the task; service was speedy.

The menu features American grill classics like steaks, chops, fish and burgers, along with homey crowd-pleasers like meatloaf and mashed potatoes. The latter — a huge sirloin loaf — was truly a star appearance and boasted a horseradish, bacon and Cheddar crust, roasted mushrooms, pan gravy and marvelously creamy mashed potatoes. Leftovers were enough for two more meals.

The appetizer standout was the zucchini "linguine" in which thin strips of zucchini replaced the pasta. The crunchy vegetable was topped with about eight large shrimp and tossed with fresh tomatoes, basil and a splash of pinot grigio. A special creamy potato soup and a vibrant French onion soup were other top picks among the appetizers.

The chopped BLT salad with blue cheese and a balsamic drizzle was a standout. The Mediterranean salad, ringed with warm pita wedges, also impressed. I was less taken with the overdressed romaine and kale Caesar salad. The trendy kale did nothing to improve the classic.

In addition to the meatloaf, our favorite entrees were the tasty marinated skirt steak, which was tender for skirt steak and bolstered by crispy tobacco onions; a platter of fall-from-the-bone tender baby back ribs; a beautifully cooked tilapia fillet with crab crust, and a flavor-packed version of chicken fajitas. Slow-roasted double-cut pork chops were juicy but the dish was unrelentingly sweet: maple glazed chops, caramelized apples and wedges of candied sweet potatoes.

Most of the desserts are made in-house. The best were the free-form three-berry tart, served à la mode, and the brownie sundae, featuring two double-wide slabs of moist brownies, ice cream, whipped cream, chocolate and caramel drizzles and mini [M&Ms](#). A Key lime tart from an outside source was appropriately tangy and was crowned with mango sorbet.

At dinner, a cone of cotton candy is brought along with the check, a sweet ending to a very satisfying meal.

Very Good

THE SPACE A sleek, bold, 130-seat restaurant with masculine good looks. Fully accessible.

THE CROWD Lots of groups, including families with children. There is a children's menu with nine entrees (\$7 to \$13). The staff is top-notch.

THE BAR An active and handsome bar with 14 stools and eight tall tables for two. There are specialty cocktails (\$10 to \$12) and 23 bottles on the wine list (\$28 to \$78). Fifteen of those wines are offered by the glass (\$9 to \$12).

THE BILL Entrees are \$9 to \$19 at lunch and \$10 to \$22 at brunch. At dinner, they range from \$12 (burger) to \$35 (surf and turf). American Express, Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

WHAT WE LIKED Zucchini "linguine," potato soup, French onion soup, chopped BLT salad, Mediterranean pita salad, meatloaf, marinated skirt steak, baby back ribs, chicken fajitas, crab-crust tilapia fillet, three-berry tart, brownie sundae, Key lime tart.

IF YOU GO Lunch, Mondays through Fridays, 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; brunch, Saturdays and Sundays, 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; dinner, Sundays 4 to 9 p.m.; Mondays through Thursdays, to 10 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays, to 11 p.m. Reservations for parties of five or more. There is a parking lot.

RATINGS Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor.