

fairy tales can come true

AZUREA – A MAGICAL SEA CHANGE. BY CATHERINE ENNIS GRIGAS | PHOTOGRAPHER ED HALL

I felt a little like Dorothy waking up in Oz when I walked through the glass doors of One Ocean Resort Hotel and Spa. I knew I wasn't in Kansas, but I wanted to at least double check my GPS to make sure I was in Atlantic Beach – and not South Beach – so glamorous and glitzy was this destination.

Past the lobby's sparkling sculptures, tinkling water fountains and chic midcentury modern decor, I made my way through an arched wood tunnel flanked by more eye-catching sculpture to Anava, the hotel's oceanfront restaurant. No, I was Alice in

AZUREA ONE OCEAN RESORT HOTEL ATLANTIC BEACH

One Ocean Boulevard
Atlantic Beach, Florida
904-249-7402

Open seven days from 7
a.m. to 11 a.m. for
breakfast, 11:30 a.m. to
2:30 p.m. for lunch, and 6
to 10 p.m. for dinner.

lounge watching beautiful people sip on colorful concoctions, including the restaurant's signature blue martini made with Ocean vodka.

Adjacent to the bar, Azurea is no doubt one of the most dazzling dining spots in North Florida. It's a complete transfor-



WATER'S EDGE

YOUR TIPS

Want to know more about a restaurant in Northeast Florida? Coastal Georgia? Tell us, and we'll check it out. Call (904) 359-4038 and leave a message along with your name and number. Or, e-mail sarah.hunt@waters-edge.com, or write to Dining Out, Water's Edge, P.O. Box 1949, Jacksonville, FL 32231.

bouche of tiny new potatoes topped with bacon and a garlicky aioli was whisked out to our table. Next came a bread basket with a cornucopia of choices – four different kinds of breads with a selection of four dipping sauces, including a zesty tapenade.

I wanted to see what wonders the chef could cook up using area ingredients, so my dining companions and I stayed with dining selections that had a local connection. We were impressed with the Cast Iron Seared Jumbo Blue Crab Cake (\$16), a light, golden patty of blue crab. The accompaniments were Southern and full of flavor – collard greens braised in cider, roasted red and yellow heirloom tomatoes and a slice of crisp smoked bacon.

The Avocado and Rock Shrimp Tian (\$14) was a lighter choice, blending delicate layers of thinly-sliced



avocado with a salad of rock shrimp. Served with a tangle of frisee lettuce drizzled with a fragrant black truffle vinaigrette and topped with crunchy strips of sweet potato crisps, it was creative and delicious.

Azurea's Seafood Boil (\$34) has an ordinary name, but it's a delightful dish of diver scallops, blue mussels, huge prawns (heads on and shells off) and a filet

Each table has an ocean view, but the interior is something to see, too. Stone-topped tables, brilliant blue walls and cozy booths upholstered in rich green fabric have a sophisticated, South Beach look.

of seared yellowtail snapper swimming in a light tomato-based broth that was served with grilled rustic bread for dipping.

The Local Catch, Three Ways (\$29) made me feel like Goldilocks. The catch that day was local grouper and it was presented as a trio of small filets prepared in three different ways. I tried it grilled with a salpicon of stone fruit, but the fruit jam seemed too sweet with the fish. Another filet was lost in the fried beignet batter, although the remoulade featuring smoked Vidalia onion was tasty. The third, a filet bronzed with a drizzling of lime butter emulsion was just right – fresh fish prepared simply.

The Coastal Reef Yellowtail Snapper (\$27) was perfectly grilled and coated with a zesty citrus thyme emulsion.

Choices in the meat department are a Cowboy Cut Bison Rib Steak (\$42), Dry Aged New York Strip with port butter (\$40), Lava Lake Ranch Young Lamb Loin with

arugula mint pesto (\$38) and organically-fed chicken breast with white wine and thyme essence (\$26.) The dishes come unaccompanied, but a selection of side dishes, such as miniature artichoke fricassee and sautéed wild mushrooms with a thyme butter fondue, can be selected for an additional \$5.

Desserts pose more choices, but there is one perfect for the indecisive – the One Ocean Dessert Sampler Platter (\$12 for two persons; \$18 for four – that was a platter of four vastly different sweets sure to please).

With service that doesn't miss a beat, a creative menu and gorgeous décor, Azurea has already won a spot as one of the top fine-dining destinations on the First Coast – and that's a fairy tale ending for a place that has undergone its own Cinderella transformation. □

Chef Peter's recipe for Coriander Dusted Chilean Sea Bass, Spiny Lobster and Mango Gastrique with Coriander Emulsion, is on Page 90.