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DINING



ON BELLE ISLAND: The Lido Restaurant at The Standard is tucked away on the Venetian Causeway.

MIAMI-DADE REVIEW

Elegant fare, fab view make The Lido a find

BY VICTORIA PESCE ELLIOTT

I fell in love with The Standard Hotel when Andre Balazs, Uma Thurman's sexy (now ex) boyfriend, reopened the iconic mah-jongg mecca nearly two years ago. When I heard that New York's most divine chef, Eric Ripert, was in charge of the food, it was nearly more than I could handle.

The French-Med cooking was, indeed, sublime, from pert salads as lightly dressed as the sunbathers around the pool to perfectly snappy little black mussels and truly French fries, but abysmal service made it tough to tout the place.

Ripert walked away from the project last year, but much of his brilliantly simple menu remains, personalized by hometown talent Mark Zeitouni, the executive chef. The Greek-style mussels with marble-size hunks of feta and sweet red pepper slivers are as good as ever and, more importantly, so are those skinny, herb-flecked fries.

The spectacular food is overshadowed only by an unrivaled waterfront vista that offers glimpses of dolphins swooping through the sparkling surf -- and undercut only by greatly improved but still uneven service.

We've had waiters who ignored us for intervals so long we could have cooked our own meals, and others who zipped around the table like hummingbirds, hovering just long enough for a sip of an order and leaving as one of us was finishing a breath. Knowledge of the petite, French-dominated wine list seems scant.

The kitchen staff, however, hasn't let us down yet. From the vegan fritto misto to the rugged Madagascar shrimp, mini burgers and a restrained summer vegetable consommé, we've been impressed. Standouts include a perfectly seared snapper with a faint wash of citrus vinaigrette and a pared-down bouillabaisse with a gently saffron-scented broth and tender morsels of white fish, tiny mussels and shrimp.

You can't go wrong with seafood here, including one of the most supple and flavorful trout I've tasted. Gorgeous golden grill marks create a slightly crusty bite, setting off moist, amazingly flavorful flesh. Ask for a hit of the outrageous garlic aioli on the side.

Ceviches, a staple these days from steakhouses to tapas bars, feel as if they were born here. The only difficulty is choosing between the snapper version with cilantro and searing jalapeño and the shrimp halves with threads of purple onion and sea salt.

Salads, too -- a mountainous nicoise loaded with snappy green beans, gently charred tuna and perfectly cooked eggs, for example, and a crispy beet and goat cheese number with walnuts and watercress -- are divinely simple yet exhilarating.

On one recent visit, the skies opened up, sending diners scrambling from every outdoor nook into the sparsely decorated, retro-Scandinavian dining room for shelter.

Even better than an evening tryst at this sexy eatery is a breezy bayside lunch beneath the market umbrellas. (Just be sure there's a breeze or you'll bake.) Sandwiches like the Lido (turkey, cucumber and dark, grainy mustard on hearty peasant bread) are satisfying but not scintillating. Stick with the seafood or anything from the grill, like the juicy churrasco paired with a sweet and spicy pepper purée.

An exquisite dessert of swollen blackberries blanketed in a dense almond crumble and sweet Chantilly cream turns a few ingredients into a masterpiece, and exemplifies the simple elegance that makes The Lido such a find.

- **Place:** The Lido Restaurant and Bayside Grill at The Standard Hotel.
- **Address:** 40 Island Ave., Miami Beach.
- **Rating:** ★★ ★ 1/2 (Excellent)
- **Contact:** 305-673-1717.
- **Hours:** 7 a.m.-11 p.m. daily; until midnight on Friday and Saturday.
- **Prices:** Appetizers \$7-\$17, entrees \$16-\$32, dessert \$6-\$8.
- **FYI:** An 18 percent service charge is added to all checks. Reservations suggested. Valet parking \$4 with validation; limited self-parking. Full bar plus juice and smoothie bar. Corkage fee \$20 for wine, \$30 for champagne.