

Hail to the Chef

Cin Cin's Scott Sopher wows diners with individualized tasting menus



PHOTO BY FRED BONDURANT

by Fred Bondurant

Three cheers for Cin Cin! Only open for about six months, this restaurant already has a following. Maybe it's because diners can choose from several ambiances—outdoor dining on the patio; the cozy Red Room, with sofas, a full-service bar, and fireplace; and a Mediterranean-style fine dining room with tables and booths.

On a recent visit, my companion and I enjoyed a pre-dinner drink in the dining room. As we perused the menu, we discovered lots of options. An eclectic selection of soups and salads. Intriguing appetizers such as vegetable baklava and stuffed quail. Vegetarian, seafood, pork, and beef entrées, each with its own flavor-enhancing sauce. Sumptuous desserts ranging from chocolate cake to berries in puff pastry. We saw many of these choices being served to other diners, making our decision even more difficult.

Then, we saw *it*, the chance for a truly unique dining experience—the Chef's

Dinner. The menu described it as a five-course meal consisting of an appetizer, first plate, seafood course, meat course, and dessert. We'd never had this experience locally, and we were intrigued by the concept of having a special meal prepared just for us.

The chef creates the first four courses using his expertise and whatever choice ingredients may be available at that moment. (Diners select a dessert from the regular menu.) They vary each evening and could even differ from table to table on the same night.

Ours consisted of an appetizer of sweet clams, perfectly cooked garbanzos, and a special sauce; tuna carpaccio over micro greens; a seafood dish consisting of a scallop, prosciutto-wrapped shrimp, and fig with endive, each with its own sauce; and beef fillet strips wrapped around a ragout of Maytag blue cheese and capicola over just-cooked vegetables. All of the desserts looked great, but we chose the Espresso

Mascarpone Torte, which was reminiscent of tiramisu, except with Oreos instead of ladyfingers. (And how could anything with Oreos not be great?)

The chef's dinner is *de rigueur* at most fine restaurants in Europe and not at all unusual in cosmopolitan areas in the United States. But now we have one right here in Southwest Florida, a perfect opportunity for folks who seek an "adventure in dining."

Unable to contain my enthusiasm, I had to know more about Cin Cin. Chef Scott Sopher (pictured, above) shared with me his philosophy on cooking and his culinary inspirations.

TOTI: How did you become interested in food preparation and find your way into this line of work?

Chef Sopher: Growing up in the Philadelphia area, my earliest jobs as a teenager were in the food industry. I knew early on that this is what I wanted