



Setting the Stage

Café Madison

33 Lafayette St.
Riverside
(856) 764-4444

Riverside's Café Madison has remained a leading name in South Jersey fine dining since it opened its doors. The restaurant has also been on *South Jersey Magazine's* radar for almost a decade, and executive chef Jack Connor captured our Top Chef title in 2010 thanks to a creative and artfully crafted menu.

The Madison as a whole is broken up into several different restaurants, including a front bar—the Towne Tavern—a martini bar, an outdoor courtyard with its own open grill and the Madison Room, an elegant and modern event space. Combined, the building forms what is an all-in-one desti-

nation for those living along the Delaware River, ranging from an upscale dining location to a place to grab a beer with friends.

Café Madison itself is easily one of the most beautiful dining rooms in South Jersey, with towering ceilings, dark walls, dramatic draperies, water fountains tucked into the walls, and elegant accents from stone detailing and a matching martini bar and partially open kitchen. If you're looking for a romantic evening out, this is the place, with a sprawling dining room and plenty of intimate tables, it sets the scene for a perfect date night.

Chef Connor's French-inspired dishes match the setting, as each are beautifully plated to highlight the food. But keep in mind that the weekend menu differs slightly from what is offered during the week, with more fine dining options featured on the weekend. During the week you can find sandwich selections, but with a more limited weekday staff and a smaller pick of full entrées this is a kitchen that is clearly designed to shine on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

Seared Ahi tuna is available all week, and prepared atop a bed of salad with fresh ginger and a wasabi *crème fraîche* sauce, as well



SEARED
AHI TUNA

ANGUS BEEF
SHORT RIBS



as a lo mein salad for the weekend menu. The Asian inspiration is apparent, but no flavors overpower the perfectly prepared tuna, which is nicely balanced with an earthy sesame seed crust and the slight spice of the creamy *crème fraîche*. Each bite carried with it a unique blend of fresh, acidic and spicy tastes that were hard to resist.

An entrée of Angus beef short ribs came braised in a house-made red wine demi-glace, with a side of seasoned mash potatoes and green beans. The cut was a perfectly sized portion of tender beef, which melted into the rich and buttery red wine sauce. A plate that is usually heavy managed to maintain a delicate balance that didn't leave our party overwhelmed.

The same could be said for the chicken Saltimbocca, which paired sautéed chicken breasts with Parma prosciutto and melted Fontina cheese, and was joined by a helping of house-made gnocchi. There was just the right bite from the salty Parma, which has always been considered one of the highest quality prosciutto varieties, and a pan demi-glace perfectly complemented the pillowy gnocchi.

Crab cakes were artfully plated with a tangy tartar sauce and fresh, sautéed vegetables. Each cake was meaty, without being overly breaded, but still had a nice crispy exterior. The crab meat was certainly the star of the dish, and served as a pleasant reminder of the warm summer days to come.

Café Madison manages to take familiar plates and make them extraordinary, thanks to a careful attention to detail, a beautiful setting and the ability to turn each dish into its own work of art. Since our last review in 2009, this place has only gotten better with age and the South Jersey dining scene is reaping the benefits. ■