

Red Sky Cafe an oasis of culinary delight along Route 9

By TAYLOR YARBOROUGH, Press Restaurant Critic | June 27, 2010

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SEAVILLE - While driving along Route 9, you won't need help finding Red Sky Cafe. This colorful, freestanding building is easy to spot, and now there's no excuse to pass it by.

It's a small BYOB with a lot of atmosphere. While you're there, you might even feel like you're in California or Key West. Decorated with a fanciful, southwest motif and an upbeat music soundtrack in the background, the vibe is cheery. It's a noisy place, but that's the way it's supposed to be.

The TexMex style menu has everything you'd find in a Mexican restaurant: nachos, burritos, enchiladas, etc., plus a few Cajun items as well, such as jambalaya and New Orleans spiced catfish.

Everyone gets a basket of corn chips with tomato salsa and sliced jalapeno peppers on the side for those who want to spike it up. The salsa is mild and actually a little sweet.

Although the chips aren't homemade, they are far less greasy than freshly fried ones. It's a trade off that I don't mind at all. My guest and I had to have some guacamole (\$4.95) with our chips as well, which was also lightly spiced. I prefer to taste more cilantro, but there are different methods of making guacamole, and they're all acceptable as long as the avocados are fresh and bountiful.



We decided to go with a "fun" appetizer that we normally wouldn't order. It happened to be one of the evening's specials. Shrimp jammers (\$9.95) were similar to (but much better than) jalapeno poppers that you find on typical bar menus. Imagine crispy, browned, perfectly fried shrimp oozing with melted cream cheese & Monterey Jack flavored with a smidgen of hot peppers. Yes, they were really yummy, but our server neglected to tell us that they were piping hot. With my first bite, the cheese squirted out and burned my lip, which I was happy to lick clean, but that didn't make it feel any better. I would have appreciated a warning. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the rest after I let them cool off a bit.

The dining room was jumping with activity, yet our entrees arrived quickly. Through an open window to the kitchen, I had a bird's eye view of the chef who was calmly preparing each meal as though he'd been doing it a very long time. As a matter of fact, our server told us, they've been open for eleven years. He's definitely got it down.

Pork carnitas (\$15.95), a tomato flavored tortilla stuffed with pulled pork, caramelized onions & roasted peppers bathed in a not-too-sweet barbecue sauce, was delicious. The meat was extremely tender and tasted great with texmati rice and confetti black beans that accompanied it and my Santa Fe trout (\$16.95), a whole pan-fried fish, with head intact, stuffed with zesty, creamy crab and shrimp. The flesh was pretty plump for a trout, and it was cooked just right.

I especially liked the whole confetti black beans in place of customary refried pinto beans. They were speckled with corn kernels, red peppers and onions, a tasty way to eat healthfully.

Healthful or not, we couldn't resist sharing a portion of warm, yummy corn bread (\$2), and, of course, we had to put a bit of butter on it.

Nothing we had was heavily spiced, but there are bottles of hot sauces on the tables, so folks can add a personal amount of fire to the food.

Desserts are brought in, but they are baked especially for Red Sky and as good as any I've had at other places that make their own.

The lime custard in the key lime tart (\$6) had nice balance. Often key lime pie is overly tart or not citrusy enough. This one came topped with fresh fruits and a thin jelly glaze. But it was the passion fruit mousse cake (\$6) that we loved. A lot of care went into this teardrop shaped, delicately decorated moist cake filled with wonderful fruity mousse. Each mouthful delightfully surprised our taste buds, and before we knew it, it was gone.

In a casual dining room, we expect good, friendly service, and that's exactly what our waitress and busboy delivered in addition to pleasant conversation. And it looked like our fellow diners were happy too.

In spite of the mishap with my shrimp jammer, I left contented, willing and ready to go back.

Red Sky Cafe has found its niche on Route 9. It's more than luck that has kept it there for 11 years. It's the whole package.

(Taylor yarborough is the pseudonym of a southern New Jersey food writer. Write to Yarborough c/o Food Editor James Clark at jclark@pressofac.com. Restaurant-ratings guide: 4 stars, extraordinary; 3 stars, excellent; 2 stars, good; 1 star, fair; 0 stars, poor.)

Red Sky Cafe

3054 Route 9

Seaville

Phone: 609-624-2550

Website: www.redskycafe.net

Rating:

Hours: Lunch daily, 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Dinner daily, 3:30 to 10 p.m.

Liquor license: BYOB

Wheelchair accessible: Restaurant, yes; restroom, no

Credit cards: Visa and MasterCard

Our bill for two: \$63 plus tip