

Reel review

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Oysters 2 Ways, one in a cream-and-Pernod stew and one crisp on the half-shell, is a special appetizer at Reel in East Rockaway. (Credit: Nicole Horton)

The Reel thing is seafood.

Reel unspools on the former site of The Fishery. Revived and remade after the devastation of superstorm Sandy, the restaurant looks almost entirely new. It's a good place to enjoy in this season of rebirth.

You can see where the waterside, alfresco tables and the umbrellas will go. Inside is a compact dining room, not especially comfortable but more restrained than most with the nautical kitsch. The main image: a stylized painting of an octopus. There's a busy bar, too.

But it's Adam Goldgell's food that will lure you. The St.James chef is best known for his appearances on the Food Network's "Restaurant Express," and his cooking at Sugo in Long Beach.

You'll remember him for an appetizer dubbed "oysters 2 ways," one a cream-and-Pernod stew with shellfish in an espresso cup that evokes the Grand Central Oyster Bar; the other, crisp, cornmeal-crusted oysters with pickled threads of carrot and red pepper. His hot smoked trout salad also is an inviting opener.

New England-style clam chowder leads the soups, trailed by so-so lobster bisque and Manhattan clam chowder. Baked clams are fine under their bacon-and-Ritz Crackers topping. The ample crab-and-scallop cakes need a bit more shellfish flavor. Meaty buffalo chicken wings will help you celebrate the dish's 50th birthday. Brussels sprout "chips" with spicy mayo are the right company for drinks.

Goldgell prepares a snappy seafood gumbo sparked with andouille sausage and shellfish. But the baked Blue Point oysters meant to gild it arrive almost blackened.

The warm lobster roll, while buttery, also is overdone. You're better off with the refreshing, cold lobster salad roll; and the lobster salad "martini" starter.

Mussel pots are mandatory. The plump mussels are sauced either fra diavolo, marinara or with garlic and white wine. Shrimp scampi-style atop linguine delivers some real flavor, with an undercurrent of lemon.

Beer-battered fish-and-chips, made with cod, is an excellent version, ready for some malt vinegar, served with crunchy fries, coleslaw and intrusively overseasoned creamed spinach.

Goldgell's big catch is a special of pan-sauteed monkfish Caribbean-style, with yellow rice, spiced coconut and red pepper sauce. Tender and moist cedar-planked salmon; and straightforward grilled tuna stand out, too.

For the meat-eater brought here by force: braised short ribs with apple risotto, strip steak, Black Angus sliders.

None of the desserts really demands your attention. But the Key lime pie is satisfactory, along with the salted caramel brownie sundae.

You'll have summer dreams.

