

Adventures in Appetite



At restaurants, I always want to share food. I have grabby hands that reach across the table for fistfuls of fries.

My fork makes its rounds to try the last bite of his dish, maybe the first bite of hers. It helps with my other problem of wanting to order everything on the menu.

But finally a restaurant understood my dilemma.

Gainesville's new KC Crave and its delicious "sharing-friendly" entrees worked with me on my chronic food hoarding. Perfectly portioned entrees designed for "tapas-style" dining created a meal all about tasting. And with the food's unexpected flavor combinations and rich, slow-roasted meats — I wanted to taste it all.

KC Crave is tucked onto a side road between 34th Street and University Avenue and screams "date night" as soon as you walk in. Almost all the tables were filled with celebrating families, parties and girls-night-out. The restaurant's two stories of dark mahogany and modern, multi-colored lighting (some of the booths actually change color as you're eating) made me glad I had dressed up a bit. Without a wait, I was seated at a high, intimate table, near walls mounted with guitars and rooms stacked to the ceiling with wine.

The waitress explained the gist of their menu: each meal is sized for one person, but served in share-friendly portions. If you want to make your dish personal, it comes with a side and salad for \$5 more. But who isn't up for a little sharing?

Before I'd even ordered an appetizer, a basket of crunchy flatbreads and roasted red pepper hummus

had arrived. Starved, I dug in.

Although I didn't drink, most everyone else around me was. The menu listed almost 30 different beers (with a large craft selection), 11 "signature martinis" and dozens of wines, among other specialty drinks. Some tables even featured self-serve beer taps.

I began with an appetizer of Hawaiian Tuna Poke.

Served in a chilled martini glass, raw tuna bites were mixed with chunks of avocado and diced onion, swimming in a ginger wasabi sauce. I resisted the urge to drink the leftover sauce at the end, no chaser. The table next to me was eating the Crab-stuffed Wonton starter with goat cheese and sweet and spicy pow sauce.

I was disappointed

sharing didn't work inter-table, too.

Planning the entrees was delicate. I knew what I wanted my order to be: the Crispy Panko Chicken, smothered in artichokes, red onion, sun dried tomatoes (my absolute favorite), feta cheese and citrus-y butter sauce.

But I wanted a say in the other dishes, as well. After all, this was a group effort.

My date finally decided on the Crabby Diane — sirloin topped with mushrooms, lump crab and brandy peppercorn sauce.

We passed up the Bacon-wrapped Filet Mignon Medallions with gouda fondue, but weren't happy about it. Another dish wait-listed for next time was the Pistachio-Crusted Lamb "Lollipops," drizzled with

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mint vinaigrette.

When the meals arrived, the presentation was half the enjoyment. The crispy chicken and sirloin were both sliced into shareable portions on white dishes drizzled artfully with sauce. The lump crab and sautéed

Our dishes twisted familiar combinations with kicks from unexpected flavors.

mushrooms were some of the best I've ever had, and the artichokes dipped first into the butter sauce and paired with the chicken made for a mouthful of near-perfection.

Our dishes twisted familiar combinations with kicks from unexpected flavors. Other menu items (like the roasted pork corn cakes with a fresh lime sour cream, or fried turkey with wasabi mashed potatoes) did the same. And even though the meat took center stage, the hints of basil or spice of red onion weren't masked.

We boxed up some of our entrees and left room for dessert. The waitress recommended (and now so do I) the Cinnamon Fried Cheesecake with vanilla ice cream, bananas and caramel sauce. The pastry-wrapped cheesecake was crispy without being greasy, and the cheesecake inside was melting and rich. Unapologetically, we finished the entire thing. Other options included Bourbon Peach Bread Pudding and Chocolate Fondue.

By the end of the meal, I was beyond impressed — and stuffed. The service is fast, the decor made it feel like a special night out, and the twisted classics couldn't be found anywhere else around town.

And for once, I didn't feel the least bit bad for tasting everyone's food at the table. ■

Here's the Basics...

PHONE: 352-224-5697

LOCATION: 3501 SW 2nd Ave.

HOURS: Monday through Friday, 4:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.

Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.

Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

MENU: The dinner menu features rich, classic dishes with modern flavor twists.

Almost all entrees include meat, ranging from lamb chops to chicken to slow-smoked salmon. The dishes are "sharing-friendly." Guests can order multiple entrees and share amongst themselves, tapas-style. The highlights of its large drink selection are the craft beers and variety of wines.

PROS: Lavish interior perfect for dates or parties, artful food presentation, fun sharing-style entrees, unique flavor twists.

CONS: Busy on weekends, some dishes expensive

PRICE: Main course items range from \$11 to \$18.

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