

BARCODE FINDS ITS MOJO

THE NEWEST ADDITION TO FORT LAUDERDALE'S FINE DINING SCENE

BY BLAKE FRENCH

The best chefs do more than cook, they create an experience. The guys over at Mojo do just that. They are more than hands behind a stove, much more; they have created a new genre of restaurant in Fort Lauderdale...and that's quite a statement.

Executive Chef Domenick Falcione and his partner have developed a restaurant eclectic and unique in every way; the appetizers and entrees--designed to be fresh, interesting, and healthy--are as colorful and vibrant as the artwork on the walls, all of which the chef creates himself.

While he never received formal art school training, Falcione has been a dedicated multi-medium artist for years, concentrating mostly on abstract and non-representational work that will remind you of Jackson Pollock's stuff. To sum this up for non-artists: colorful, mind-bending paintings create the atmosphere, and its way cool.



Mojo opened in July. It showcases a casually elegant restaurant and lounge atmosphere. The menu fuses together ingredients from several different cultures, earning a title of New American Eclectic Cuisine. It's a strange title, and even more difficult to describe. But it sure keeps your taste buds awake.

Like, for example, the calamari made with Japanese Seven Spice, sweet Thai chili, and lime juice. Or the baked escargot, served with artichoke hearts, feta cheese, grape tomatoes, garlic butter, and white wine sauce. Both appetizers are difficult to put down, even as the next dish arrives.

Falcione's cuisine doesn't show signs of ego. The food is presented in an eye-catching way without flashiness; the flavors are distinct, but never over-the-top. Take, for instance, one of the appetizer specials, spicy baby octopus and conch. It's made with carmelitos, avocado, cucumbers, cilantro, jalapeños, and sesame oil.

The dish is plenty spicy to keep you on your toes, but not fiery enough to have you reaching for water. It shows control. The heat complements the flavors...it doesn't distract from them.

Too often these days, restaurants cut costs by cutting food quality; it is refreshing to learn that Mojo is a restaurant of integrity. Whenever possible, management uses premium, health-conscious ingredients, organic products, free range chicken, and certified organic salmon.

For dinner, it's easy to settle for one of Mojo's gourmet salads, pastas, or stir fry dishes. At the same time, the menu lets you be a little adventurous, so try something different if your mood permits.

I decided to live a little, and try the Zuppa di Pesce, a seafood extravaganza with crab, shrimp, clams, mussels, scallops, fresh fish



of the day, toast points, and aioli, all tossed in a bold, robust tomato blend. It's served in an oversized bowl, plenty big enough to share.



There are many different layers of flavor in the dish, but nothing contrasting. The ingredients blend well, but are individualistic enough to create a unique experience with each bite. The tomatoes are bold and zesty, but don't overpower the seafood. In a word...the dish is a culinary adventure.

Mojo is fine dining when the food hits your mouth, but not when the check hits the table. Surprisingly, the prices are reasonable for cuisine of this caliber. They have a great lounge, as well, with a stage for live music and DJs. So there's no excuse to be lacking in Mojo in Fort Lauderdale. Now you know where to get some. ::

Mojo is located at 4140 N. Federal Hwy in Fort Lauderdale. For reservations and more information, call (954) 568-4443 or visit www.mojofl.com.