

# OLLI AT VANDERBILT

## Restaurant Adventures Winter 2017

**Restaurant:** Darfon's

**Date:** Monday, November 28, 2016.

**Time of day:** 11:30 am

**Location:** 2810 Elm Hill Pike (in Donelson, very close to the airport)

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek

**Restaurant Description:** Darfon's is a large restaurant with plenty of both booth and table seating. The décor has a lot of dark wood meant to represent a more classic style. Our group did not sit in the main dining area. I called ahead and Monday's are slower so they were able to seat us in the private dining area.

**Seating/comfort:** The private dining area's seating was comfortable. I have been to Darfon's before and sat in the main dining area. The seats were comfortable and tables were spaced far enough apart to allow for easy access to the main door or the bathroom.

**Service:** I was informed ahead of time that our table would have one assigned waiter, so the ordering and fulfilling process could take a bit longer. Our server was a pro – he was organized and knew all the answers to food and preparation questions. Allowing him the time to answer questions was well worth it. Normally, Darfon's requires a single check for a party of 14, but they were delighted to have a new group from Vanderbilt (don't forget it was a Monday) and separate checks were OK'd. Our server also did an excellent job of providing everyone their correct bill and receiving payment.

[Viv's comment: I emailed the manager the next day to thank the waiter for such a good job.]

**Food:** The lunch and dinner menus are the same, so lunch portions are ample. The menu is extensive – there is something for everyone, whether you are a meat eater, prefer fish or vegetarian. If you are a steak or prime rib fan (I am not), this looks like a place to try. Along with the many starters and entrees there are plenty of sandwich options which include burgers, tuna, salmon and chicken.

**Price:** Appetizers run between \$7.00 and \$16.00. Steak and Prime Rib entrees run between \$25.00 and \$27.00. Other entrees run between \$19.00 (Chicken Davinci) and \$24.00 (Scallops). The group felt that the prices equaled the overall value.

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** Full bar. The wine listing is large – you'll need some time to decide. The beer list is good, considering the focus is on wine. Darfon's could use a few more draft options, but the variety they had on hand satisfied the beer drinkers.

**Noise Level:** We were in the private dining area so the only chatter came from our fine group of 14 – so no problem. I have been in Darfon's twice before, once for lunch and once for dinner. Lunch is much more tame and conversations easy. When I was there for dinner, it was packed and the chatter level was nasty. You could only converse with the person right next to you.

**Parking:** Not a problem. Darfon's has a huge parking area surrounding the restaurant. However, I have heard that parking for dinner could be a problem if it is peak time.

**Overall recommendation:** I would highly recommend Darfon's for lunch. The menu is extensive, the food is well-prepared, commendable service, ample parking and easy to find if you're heading over to the airport area. However, I know how insane I-40 can be during rush hour and how loud the restaurant can be during peak dinner time, so...enjoy a leisurely lunch with some friends.

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**Restaurant: Fin & Pearl**

**Date:** Tuesday, December 13, 2016.

**Time of day:** 11:30 pm

**Location:** 211 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. S. (Just to the left of Del Frisco's restaurant in the 12/12/ building)

**Number of attendees:** 18

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek

**Restaurant description:** Fin & Pearl is large, open and absolutely gorgeous. As the name implies, the restaurant specializes in seafood and there are nautical-themed art pieces throughout the restaurant. The bar is especially visually unique, with sail-like sculptures surrounding the circular base. I called ahead and made arrangements for a large group and we were seated in the "Boat House," a beautiful space designed to mimic a boat house on the coast. (*Great Idea for large parties!*)

**Seating/comfort:** As mentioned we were not seated in the main dining area. The seating in the "Boat House" was comfortable enough for me (and I can get very picky). I did take a walk through the main restaurant -- seating looks adequately comfortable and the tables are spaced a nice distance apart. The husband-unit and I had a beer at the bar while waiting for others and we were impressed with the layout, atmosphere and all around "feel" of the place.

**Service:** Our group was assigned two dedicated waiters. They did an excellent job considering there were 18 of us. They both were highly knowledgeable regarding the menu items and explained things clearly. They had no problems doing separate checks (I arranged this ahead of time.) I have to believe that the service in the main dining area would be just as exceptional.

**Food:** The lunch menu is diverse with a number of sandwiches and many seafood entrees. There is a board you check daily to see what the fresh catch of the day is. Everyone was happy with their food. The only complaint I heard was from husband-unit who ordered the lobster roll. He said it was quite good, but a bit too small. He did mention that the clam chowder was unbelievably good.

**Price:** We all ordered from the lunch menu. Sandwiches cost between \$11.00 and \$20.00. Lunch entrees run around \$18 to \$20 with the seasonal catch probably being a bit more. The dinner menu offers many other fish and meat options with the price to match.

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** Full bar. The draft beer selection is respectable and the bartender was knowledgeable. I didn't look at the wine list, but the website has a long and varied listing.

**Noise Level:** We were seated in the "Boat House" which was set in back of the main restaurant. With 18 of us, the chatter level at times was a bit loud, but no one seemed to notice or care. After walking around the main dining area, the noise level seemed very tolerable. However, there are many reflective surfaces in the restaurant and I can see where noise/chatter could be a problem during peak hours.

**Parking:** Parking is valet only but it is complimentary. There are parking lots in the gulch (down the hill) if you feel like walking a bit or visiting the gulch afterwards.

**Overall recommendation:** I can't wait to go back and try some other menu items. The place is gorgeous, the food is great, and the atmosphere is unpretentious and comfortable. This reviewer recommends Fin & Pearl, at least for lunch. Of note – Fin & Pearl is also open for Breakfast.

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**Restaurant: Vui's Kitchen**

**Date:** Wednesday, December 28, 2016.

**Time of day:** 11:30 am and 1:00 pm

**Location:** 2832 Bransford Ave. (In the Berry Hill area)

**Number of attendees:** 7

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek (unable to attend, but gathered input)

**Restaurant description:** Vui's Kitchen focuses on fresh and flavorful Vietnamese food. The restaurant is small and very busy during lunch time. They do not take reservations or make accommodations for large groups. We had 7 interested people and I split them into two groups; one group of three at 11:30 and one group of four at 1:00.

**Seating/comfort:** The place is small, but none of the Osher folks complained.

**Service:** The comments were that the place is busy, and somewhat chaotic, but the service was polite and efficient.

**Food:** All attendees who responded were very impressed with the food and thought it was flavorful, obviously fresh and visually appealing. Several folks are ready to go back anytime.

**Price:** Very affordable – many items around the \$10.00 area. There is a reason why this restaurant is always busy.

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** One diner reported that they did have beer which is a plus for this writer.

**Noise Level:** From the reports, the noise/chatter level was nasty at times. This is not surprising considering the size of the place.

**Parking:** Parking anywhere in the Berry Hills area is always a "challenge." The diners reported that parking is an issue. There is a small designated parking area, but it is cramped, so be careful.

**Overall recommendation:** The restaurant may be small, but it is extremely popular because the food is the star. Consider going early or after traditional lunch hours. The next time I go to Wild Birds Unlimited, I may need to stop by.

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**Restaurant: Savarinos Cucina**

**Date:** Thursday, January 12, 2017

**Time of day:** 11:30 a.m.

**Location:** 2121 Belcourt Avenue, in Hillsboro Village

**Number of attendees:** 17

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek

**Restaurant description:** Savarinos Cucina is a highly casual place serving Italian sandwiches, pasta and pizza. The restaurant is not large, not small and it clearly caters to the college crowd. I called the day before so they had two tables prepared for our large group.

**Seating/comfort:** Wooden seats functioned but I needed my cushion.

**Service:** Our group was assigned one waiter, which was definitely not enough. Taking the orders, serving the food and taking care of the checks ended up being a prolonged process.

**Food:** The hot dishes were rated more favorably than the sandwiches. One attendee got the vegetarian pizza, which in my opinion, had a real lack of vegetables. But she did enjoy it. I got a pesto, meat and mozzarella hoagie thought it was hugely disappointing. Husband-unit got the lasagna dish. He said it tasted good, but the preparation was very odd (the noodles were not in layers). Everyone ate their lunch, but I didn't hear any rave reviews.

**Price:** Affordable, but I'd go elsewhere for Italian food.

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** They have a wine and liquor license, but no beer license (and I still showed up). Apparently, the change in beer law on January 1<sup>st</sup> messed them up somehow. They are applying for the proper beer license.

**Noise Level:** We arrived early and our group was the only diners there for at least 30 minutes. So, we were able to converse easily with our fellow OSHER diners. However, the restaurant has many reflective surfaces and some conversations were difficult. Peak hours – forget it!

**Parking:** Folks either parked on the street or in the Belcourt parking lot. Getting to the parking is the problem as the Hillsboro area traffic is a nightmare.

**Overall recommendation:** Savarino's Cucina obviously caters to a younger (and less discerning) crowd than the Osher group. There are better places to get Italian food. Try Amerigo's on West End.

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**Restaurant:** Sitar

**Date:** Friday, January 27, 2017

**Time of day:** 1:00

**Location:** 116 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue North, Nashville (Midtown)

**Number of attendees:** 16

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek

**Restaurant description:** Sitar is an Indian restaurant known for their excellent buffet. The place is casual and the diners are diverse group, ranging from students to business people and everything in between. There are several pictures with Indian themes on the walls, but nothing special. Actually, the entire restaurant could use a bit of updating.

**Seating/overall comfort:** Seats are functional, but not particularly comfortable. Tables are placed (almost) too close together, making the trips to the buffet somewhat awkward. However, all of us went to the buffet line at least three times, so it couldn't have been that bad. The bathroom gets a "D." There is only one unisex bathroom and frankly, it's ugly. (At least it worked.) My advice, go before you leave home and go easy on the water (or beer) intake while you're there.

**Service:** Our group was given an extended table, so we were able to sit together. Our waiter was efficient and pleasant. Paying our checks took a while, but no one was in a hurry. This is a buffet, so you serve yourself – as many trips as you'd like. There always seemed to be someone to pick up a used plate so going back to the buffet (over and over) was never a problem.

**Food:** The variety in the buffet was impressive. Meats included fish, chicken and lamb. There were also many vegetable options. There were two types of rice – both cooked perfectly. Some dishes were spicy, but all were exceptionally flavorful. Most of the diners had been there before, so the large buffet was not a surprise, but a welcome visit.

**Price:** Extremely affordable (around \$13.00 for the buffet) and one of the best values in town for the amount of food you get.

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** Beer is available. Those of us who drink beer chose the King Fisher – a lighter beer that is perfect with Indian food.

**Noise Level:** Be prepared – the place is noisy. Sitar is not a large restaurant and due to its popularity, the restaurant has placed as many tables as possible in the two rooms. By the time we were on dessert, the place wasn't quite as noisy.

**Parking:** Parking was a challenge for some people. Our diners often had to drive around a bit before finding a spot. This is a very popular restaurant.

**Overall recommendation:** If you love Indian food, you can't do better than Sitar. The food is excellent and at a great price. However, understand that there are some trade-offs: noise level, bad bathroom, cramped seating and not enough parking. If you go, do not go during peak lunch hours.

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**Restaurant: Del Friscos**

**Date:** Tuesday, February 7, 2017

**Time of day:** 1:00 p.m.

**Location:** 1201 Demonbreun (in the 12/12 building, corner of Demonbreun and 12<sup>th</sup>)

**Number of attendees:** 21

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek from attendee feedback

**Restaurant description:** Del Friscos is a new restaurant located in the bottom floor of the new 12/12 building. The restaurant is large and beautifully designed and decorated. It markets itself as "An Upscale American Bar & Grill."

**Seating/overall comfort:** The group was seated in the private room in the back of the restaurant, which had plenty of room. I've been there before, and the booth seating is very comfortable and the tables are spaced comfortably apart. The bathrooms are large and pretty.

**Service:** The group reported to me that the service was very good. The only hiccup was getting everyone's checks paid. I can tell you that when my husband and I were there for lunch (just the two of us), the service was very good.

**Food:** Del Friscos has a large selection of appetizers, sandwiches, salads and meat or fish entrees. About half of the Osher diners (those that responded to my request for feedback) were extremely happy with their lunches, the other half said their selection was fine, but nothing exceptional. One diner mentioned the fish tacos as a good choice. The chicken avocado wrap was given an "OK" rating. One diner mentioned how nicely the food was displayed. The Tuesday "daily dish" was chicken pot pie. Two people ordered this but it was no longer available, so the diners had to select something else. The manager gave the two a certificate for a free appetizer to compensate for the inconvenience. Congrats to Del Friscos for doing the right thing.

**Price:** Appetizers run between \$11.00 and \$12.50. Sandwiches run between \$14.00 and \$17 (prime rib sandwich). Salads are between \$7.00 (mixed greens) and \$17.50 (steak or seared tuna).

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** Full Bar. Very decent draft beer selection.

**Noise Level:** The group was in the private room, so the noise level was fine. However, several diners reported that the actual restaurant was quite noisy. There are many reflective surfaces that exacerbate the noise problem. Plus, it is popular, so lots of chatter.

**Parking:** Parking is valet which turned out to be a challenge, as the valet attendants somehow misplaced one of the diner's keys. Sure hope this doesn't happen often.

**Overall recommendation:** The restaurant is new, nicely decorated and the menu has something for everyone – so give it a try. If you can, request a booth.

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**Restaurant:** Amerigo

**Date:** Wednesday, February 22, 2017.

**Time of day:** 1:00 p.m.

**Location:** 1920 West End Ave (Midtown)

**Number of attendees:** 14

**Reviewer:** Viv Pocek

**Restaurant description:** Amerigo's is one of the most reliable restaurants in Nashville for excellent and consistent Italian food. It is a large restaurant with plenty of seating. I had no problem requesting a table for 14 people. The food is always consistent and good.

**Seating/overall comfort:** Chairs are fairly comfortable and the tables are placed a comfortable distance apart. Bathrooms are easily accessible.

**Service:** The restaurant was notified days before regarding the size of our party. We were assigned a dedicated server, who did an outstanding job. Food was delivered in an appropriate amount of time, considering the size of the group. Separate checks were not a problem (this was requested ahead of time).

**Food:** Everyone was very happy with the dish they ordered. Several of us ordered the shrimp bisque to start and it was marvelous. Pasta was served at a perfect firmness and the sauces were exceptionally tasty. There are daily specials. Wednesday was "Nashville Hot Chicken Pasta Alfredo" which husband-unit ordered and enjoyed thoroughly.

**Price:** A truly good value for the amount and quality of the menu items. Daily specials are \$9.00. Main courses run between \$10.00 and \$15.00. The soup and salad combination was \$8.00 (an outstanding value, considering the size of the Caesar salad).

**Beer/Wine/Liquor:** Full bar. Draft beer selection is not large, but varied – something for everyone.

**Noise Level:** We were seated in the rear of the restaurant and thus conversations were not difficult. It should be noted that we were seated at 1:00. By the time our food arrived, at least half of the diners had left. Be aware, Amerigo is a very popular place with the business crowd, so prime lunch time will get crowded and a bit noisy, but nothing oppressive. One tidbit from a beer drinker...if you go with one other person, the bar is a great place to eat and have a conversation without a lot of chatter.

**Parking:** There is ample parking behind Amerigo. If for any reason that lot is full, Blackstone's has closed and there is plenty of parking there.

**Overall recommendation:** If you love Italian food, Amerigo is a good choice. The food is excellent, the service attentive, the ambiance pleasant and the location in Mid-town can't be beat.