

Restaurants

Imagine the friendly service of the Keg, upped a notch. Imagine the affordable, eclectic menu of earls, upped two notches. Then imagine a price upped hardly at all.

BY LINDA BATES VANCOUVER SUN

Relish partners Leigh Angman, Todd Angman, Matt Landin, Ben Letts and Ron Pope, all of whom came up through the kitchens of earls and the Keg, could imagine all of this, and they made it reality in their new restaurant, which opened just seven weeks ago.

Letts says all the partners, who first met in 1992, had seen different aspects of restaurants that worked, and they wanted to combine as many as they could in one place. Relish: The Restaurant and Lounge is the result.

And speaking of imagining, it's hard for me to imagine how this place could be anything but a winner. The beautiful room is elegant yet casual, with a fireplace for rainy days and a large patio for sunny ones. Maitre d' Jason Sohor was so attentive and eager to talk about the restaurant I thought for a minute my cover had been blown and he knew I was there for The Sun. But no, he was equally considerate with other diners, asking each if they'd prefer a water view (an outside fountain) or the fireplace and readily answered questions.

Our servers, too, were friendly and professional without being the least bit snooty.

Then there's the food — half a dozen daily specials and many more menu items. There's a good B.C. balance of fresh seafood, chicken, meat and vegetarian entrees, with prices ranging mostly from \$12 to \$20. During a couple of visits I sampled a wonderful Creole catfish with a mushroom and corn risotto cake, the fish breaded and fried yet delicate and light; a chorizo-stuffed roast chicken topped with apricots; and a walnutcrusted wild salmon. In every case the dishes were fresh, original without being weird, and served in nicely sized portions.

Appetizers and salads too show imagination in their combination of flavours. The Southwest seafood salad, for example, combines seared seafood, black beans and avocado with chipotle lime dressing.

And excellent news for wine drinkers — here's a place to get a very nice \$5 glass of wine. If you're irked, as I am, with the number of restaurants charging \$8 for a glass of wine that costs only \$10 a bottle at the liquor store, then this is the place for you. The owners have sought out good, affordable wines and chosen not to mark them up exorbitantly. I was so impressed with the South African shiraz our server recommended (yes, \$5 a glass) that I've already gone out and bought myself a bottle. Of course, if

you want to pay more, you can. The wine list is extensive.

The dessert list (most \$6) includes nice surprises. Okay, I thought the peanut butter creme brulee was a little over the top, but my companion loved it. Perfect for sharing was the chocolate fondue. Remember fondue from the '60s and '70s? Why did it go out of style? The combination of cool fresh fruit and warm chocolate ganache makes a light, satisfying finish to the meal. Another nice touch is coffee and cookies for \$4. And you can order any dessert and a latte for \$6.50.

Relish consists of a restaurant and lounge (hence the name). The lounge has big-screen TVs for sports watching and is more of a place to "chill out," says Letts. For a meal, the restaurant is the place. Brunch, pizza and pasta and sandwiches are available as well as entrees.

Count me in as a fan. My only complaint? That annoying lower-case "r" in the name. What can I say? Once an English teacher, always an English teacher.

Restaurant visits are conducted anonymously and inter views are done by phone. Restaurants are rated out of 5.

relish: The Restaurant and Lounge

888 Nelson, 604-669-1962. www.relishtherestaurant.com. Open 10 a.m. to midnight Saturday and Sunday and 11 a.m. to midnight Monday through Friday.

Overall 4 Food 4 Ambience 4 1 /2 Service 4 Price \$\$



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN Chef Ron Pope shows the seafood wonton stack at relish restaurant, which serves fresh seafood, chicken, meat and vegetarian dishes.