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## Leopard Lounge/ Palm Beach

By John Tanasychuk  
Sun-Sentinel

**Important:** This article was last updated on January 25, 2002. Please call ahead to confirm hours, prices, dates and other information.

★★★★☆ Having only heard of the Leopard Lounge, I imagine an eccentric room covered in leopard prints, perhaps even hunting trophies and taxidermy. Garishly funky Palm Beach.

But when we arrive at the elegant Chesterfield Hotel, there are uniformed valets waiting for our car. We walk through a courtyard, inside the hotel and then through a narrow set of red doors, where the combo is already playing at 8 p.m.

There is just a hint of leopard in the room -- on china borders, menus and curtains. Chairs are red lacquer, the curtains burgundy and the dance floor lit from underneath. Elegant but comfortable, it feels a lot like the old supper clubs of my parents' generation. It may be the only spot in Palm Beach with live music seven nights a week.

The hotel was built in 1926 with the Leopard Room arriving nine years ago. The kitchen is currently directed by chef Jay Redington, who has created a menu that gently rides between two palates: Palm Beach continental and off-island New American.

Thus, appetizers include a generous portion of smoked salmon (\$11) served with toast points and endive leaves filled with chopped egg white, chopped yolks, onion and capers. There's also perfectly cooked shrimp cocktail (\$13), a meaty crab cake (\$12) and mushroom caps (\$7). These are restaurant standards that measure up perfectly.

But then there are jerk chicken pot stickers (\$7), dumplings filled with spicy chicken, steamed, fried and served with a sweet yet chili-spiced dipping sauce. They are a nice addition to the standard side of the appetizer menu.

We are famished when we arrive, but our waiter -- youthfully professional -- seems intent on this being a three-hour dining experience. Even water and cocktails are slow in coming, but they arrive with a plate of cheese toast, five pieces for each of us. We ask for and receive another before appetizers have hit the table. We wait at least 30 minutes before each course and our plates aren't cleared quickly enough.

But sometimes a dining experience is about more than service and food.

We move on to second courses: Grilled asparagus (\$8) is served with shaved parmesan. Caesar salad (\$8) is a classic example, but this one is light on garlic and served with white anchovy crostini. Arugula salad (\$11) includes port-soaked Asian pears, candied walnuts, blue cheese and a raspberry vinaigrette. Baked onion soup (\$6) is thin, not the dark meaty flavor one usually finds in a crock of this sort. Thin also describes tomato bisque (\$6) with chiffonade of spinach and creme fraiche. It's almost as if the bisque was made with skim milk instead of cream.

Dover sole meuniere (\$32) is delightful, but the

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accompanying wild rice pilaf is disappointing because it's undercooked. Grilled chop steak (\$34) is nicely seasoned and well-cooked, but the french fries are oily. Grilled strip steak (\$34) is chewy but sinful with crab and Bernaise sauce and roasted shallot mashed potatoes.

depicted in photos is not necessarily a dish served by a particular restaurant, but instead represents its kind of cuisine.

Two entrees stand out. Grilled veal chop (\$41) with marsala sauce, Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and crispy onions, and herb-crusted rack of lamb (\$37) with honey Dijon sauce and roasted new potatoes. They are classics that start with good cuts of meat and a perfect sauce. Dessert doesn't seem to have much of a chef's touch. There's a hot fudge sundae (\$6), cheesecake (\$7), chocolate mousse cake (\$6), creme brulee (\$7) and Key lime pie (\$6).

They are serviceable desserts that don't seem to match the special occasion that is dining at the Leopard Lounge. If dinner doesn't tempt you, come after dinner. Wear your best jewelry and dance.

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