

# DINING WITH THE BON VIVANT

## Amos Mosquito's Swampside Cafe

**B**UZZ. BUZZ. After one visit to Amos Mosquito's Swampside Cafe, on the Morehead City waterfront, you might begin to rethink your opinion of this pesky insect. The relaxed casual atmosphere combined with an eclectic menu makes any meal there an enjoyable one.

You get an idea of what's in store when you first enter the restaurant. Crickets and other bug sounds greet you with a melody that reminds you of warm summer evenings. The entrance, as well as the dining area, are covered with trees draped with Spanish moss. Binoculars are necessary to spot owls and other birds perching in the trees.

The green and white-check tablecloths are topped with small gas lanterns to further bring the outside inside — an important goal to manager and chef Hallock Cooper. Hardwood floors shine in the main dining room as well as the bar. The main dining room has a beautiful water view and outside dining is available weather permitting.

When you visit the restaurant for Sunday brunch you might be greeted by wait staff with names such as Flo, Beulah, Billy Bob, Honey or Darlin'. The brunch menu includes some of the more popular lunch dishes as well as many egg dishes. Choose your selection from a menu backed by cardboard with plastic ants circling the choices.

"We have a very good eggs Benedict with crab cakes and Hollandaise sauce," says Cooper. "It's a nice brunch at reasonable prices."

You can also mix and garnish your own drink at the Bloody Mary bar. Garnishes include pickled okra, limes and various mixers.

Cooper has also added a budget lunch special every Tuesday through Saturday. For under \$6.50 you'll get a sandwich, fries and a drink.

The sandwich menu includes German Knackwurst served with sauerkraut and spicy mustard. The crab burger is topped with chipotle aioli and lettuce. Both come with an order of fries. Vegetable lovers can choose a sauteed vegetables and goat cheese on focaccia bread with a fruit salad.

Cooper says the Chinese chicken salad is popular with the lunch crowd.

"It's unique to us," she adds. "It has iceberg lettuce, snow peas, water chestnuts and mandarin oranges." The Chinese dressing is "real gingery and zingy." The salad is topped with fried wonton noodles and served with chopsticks. Forks are allowed!

The selections only get better on the dinner menu. A visit on Thursday evening results in a 10 percent discount on the dinner tickets.

Start your meal with fried calamari, chicken satay with Szechwan peanut sauce or the house potato chips and blue cheese dip.

"It's a big mound of homemade potato chips with blue cheese dip," says Cooper.

The bread, served in tin pails, is made in the restaurant.

"We definitely have a little bit of everything," Cooper says. "We have some seafood, steaks, chicken, and pasta."

Cooper's specialty is savory cooking and it shines in the entree selections. Try the wild mushrooms and linguine topped with Parmesan cheese and truffle oil. Or how about the crab cakes on penne pasta with sun-dried tomatoes, spinach and chipotle aioli.

"The crab cakes hands down are our most popular dish," says Cooper.

Scallops are served with asparagus and mashed potatoes.

For a meal for two, try the whole-roasted fish with a trio of dipping sauces, when available.



Crickets and other bug sounds remind you of warm summer evenings. The entrance, as well as the dining area, are covered with trees draped with Spanish moss. Binoculars are necessary to spot owls and other birds perching in the trees. (Mark Scribbins photo)

The restaurant offers two different steak dishes. Both are delicious. Choose from a grilled Angus filet with asparagus and a wild mushroom ragout or a lime-marinated flank steak with black bean salsa, quesadilla and corn on the cob.

"The flank steak is sort of a Mexican plate," Cooper says.

"They are two very different meals."

(See Swampside Pg. 24)

## Swampside

(Continued from Pg. 19)

If you really want to feel you are outdoors, roast your own marshmallows over a small Hibachi grill and make S'mores for dessert. These come complete with graham crackers, chocolate bars and guaranteed sticky fingers.

If you're not in the mood for a campfire, try a pecan pie square. Just like Granny used to make, only better. It's served with bourbon cream sauce. Cheesecake choices are Margarita and chocolate swirl. Only serious chocolate lovers are to try the chocolate swirl cheesecake. The dessert menu is rounded out with fat-free lemon parfait, ice cream sundaes, lemon cake and strawberry shortcake.

"I want our customers to feel they had a great meal at a good price and they had a lot of fun here," Cooper says.

If you are looking for a site for your office or family holiday party, there are still openings at the restaurant. Cooper says the restaurant can hold about 80 for a sit-down meal as well as accommodate smaller, more intimate gatherings. The restaurant also caters for all occasions — at the restaurant or at a site of your choice.

Amos Mosquito's is an excellent site for a tea party for kids and kids at heart. What a wonderful idea for a young girl's birthday party!

"We had a tea party for an 8-year-old girl here," Cooper adds. "We served scones, sandwiches and desserts."

Amos Mosquito's Swampside Cafe does an excellent job of serving savory meals at good prices while bringing the outside inside — everything, that is, but mosquitoes.

The restaurant is open for Sunday brunch from noon to 3 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and for dinner beginning at 5:30 p.m. Reservations aren't necessary, but are welcome. The restaurant has all ABC permits. Drive-up boat access is available.

Amos Mosquito's will be closed for dinner on Dec. 23 and will reopen on Tuesday, Dec. 28. The restaurant will be open on New Year's Eve with special menu selections and will be closed on New Year's Day.

Amos Mosquito's Swampside Cafe is across from Dee Gee's Gifts and Books on the Morehead City waterfront. For more information, call 4252/247-6222.