



DEVRA FIRST

Fishing for new spot

Are there enough top-quality seafood restaurants in Boston?



Devra First: The old Great Bay space is getting a new tenant: Island Creek Oyster Bar.

GoodCookDoris: Hope they do well! I wonder what will move into the [now closed] Foundation Lounge Space. I think the [Hotel Commonwealth] is looking for a different crowd. They did great drinks there. The food choices were a little sparse. . .

D.F.: I mentioned on our food blog, Dishing, that the oyster bar would be a great addition to our oddly lacking seafood restaurant scene. Someone replied: "What the heck are you talking about, lacking?" I think that for a city known for seafood, we have relatively few great, specifically seafood-focused restaurants. What do you think?

Guest: I totally agree about the lacking seafood scene! I feel like the only "nice" seafood restaurant is Atlantic Fish! We need some more around here!

D.F.: You might want to check out Neptune Oyster Bar in the North End. It's casual but very good.

Everymoms: I agree. I can't say that there are too many places to get a really GREAT seafood meal. The places people know about by name, specifically "tourist traps," have the worst food, in my

experience.

D.F.: Yes, though I was surprised by Legal C Bar. The food didn't blow me away, but it was solid, and the place was quite fun, polished, even . . . kind of hip? Maybe it was the cocktails talking. Good cocktails there.

Guest: It's also pretty expensive. \$27 for a lobster roll? (Though delicious!)

D.F.: We're talking about Neptune again, I believe. Yes, it's not cheap.

Guest: I do enjoy Mare in the North End for seafood, though. It's very good.

Everymoms: I read your review and was surprised as well. I have heard mixed on Legal C.

D.F.: I was mixed on it, too, but less mixed than I'd expected.

Everymoms: I guess I'll try it for myself. I worked for Legal way back when!

D.F.: You'll probably recognize all the same service tips they drilled into you. (If you were a server, that is.) The high points were the cocktails. And the cougars.

Jason: I like Neptune and B&G, but again, they definitely are not cheap. The price you have to pay for good seafood.

Ginger: I went to the Skipjack's in Newton for a business lunch meeting

last week and was pleasantly surprised.

The food was delicious, and the staff was very attentive. They have sushi as well as a well-rounded menu that was pretty inexpensive (it was lunch, but they also have happy hour specials).

Meaux: No seafood? Oceanaire, Atlantic Fish, Skipjack's, Neptune Oyster, Mare, East Coast Grill, even Legal. Let's face it, most popular Boston restaurants are touristy. They live and die by tourists. It doesn't make them bad places.

Hungry: Does it surprise you to see hourlong waits at some places even though the economy is at a standstill?

D.F.: From P.F. Chang's to the Franklin Cafe, some places are just popular, whether because of geography, price point, food. . . . There are always going to be those places. When I've talked with chefs and restaurateurs about this, some say the economy serves as a chaff-sorting process. The less successful restaurants will feel the brunt, while the more successful ones will thrive. In the scheme of things you can do to cheer yourself in a bum economy, eating a nice dinner out can be a small investment. Maybe cheaper than the movies. Are you all surprised when you see a busy

restaurant these days?

Everymoms: I'm not surprised if the food is consistently good.

GoodCookDoris: I agree — a great meal with great service can be a fantastic night out!

Cheerful Hamster: If you want to see BUSY, try the Fat Cat in Quincy. Great food at reasonable prices will keep the place full. Fat Cat is always consistent, which is another key to their success.

GoodCookDoris: In this economy, I find myself checking out reviews and recommendations on new places. I want to make sure that I'm not going to waste my dining out budget on a sub-par experience. We tend to stick with our favorites.

Everymoms: I agree with Doris. I tend to go back to the same places for certain types of food because of their consistency.

Excerpted from Devra First's weekly chat. Go to Boston.com today at 11 a.m. to chat live about your favorite dishes, recipes, and restaurants. Food editor Sheryl Julian will take your questions today. Devra First will return next week. She can be reached at dfirst@globe.com.

CHRIS GASH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE