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O'Connor's Restaurant
1160 West Boylston St.
508-853-0789

Sample Menu

Guinness	\$4
Smoked salmon	\$8
Crab cakes	\$12
Creme caramel	\$4
Dinner for two before tip	\$45

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By Paul Bernard

Walk into O'Connor's Restaurant and there before you is all the proof you need that you've made a sound choice. The walls along the entrance ramp leading into the dining room are plastered with a decade's worth of reviews, every one extolling its hospitality. O'Connor's has steadily grown during those years: a dining room added here, the bar moved there. All too often, rapid growth dampens quality, so we paid a visit to this old favorite for a reality check.

The typical quarter-hour-plus wait for a table at O'Connor's is actually one of the pleasures of the place. I look forward to time well-spent in the bar, which replicates the look and feel of an Irish pub right down to the beer taps and the boisterous crowd. But on this most recent visit, there was no waiting for a table at all. We were seated immediately.

The dining rooms are so festooned with Irish bric-a-brac and ephemera that it

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The gentle charms of O'Connor's

seems only respectful to start off with the Isle's national drinks. I ordered a Guinness Stout draft. My companion requested Jameson whiskey on ice. We also decided to share the traditional Irish oak smoked salmon appetizer.

O'Connor's menu still offers a surprising span of cuisines, from traditional Irish through nouvelle. One featured entrée has been named for Worcester's new mayor, Tim Murray. Ray Mariano can take heart, for he still has a salad named in his honor.

Our drinks and appetizer were served promptly. The chilled slices of salmon were as soft as butter and retained their delicate flavor. They were dressed with capers, slices of Bermuda onion, and a small Caesar salad. Even though I'm not usually a fan of condiments, I must note that the horseradish dip was quite tasty and made with fresh ingredients.

Entrées come with a choice of soup or salad. I chose the butternut bisque and found it to be delicious. The sweetened squash was generously flavored with nutmeg. My guest had the garden salad with Parmesan peppercorn dressing; a variety of colors and textures, all crispy-fresh. The service we enjoyed throughout our meal was attentive, well-timed, and very enthusiastic.

Exploring the menu's diversity, I went nouvelle with the "Emeril-Style" crab and rock shrimp cakes. A portion of three, these were solid crabmeat studded with lumps of shrimp. The flavor was enhanced with bits of red and yellow peppers and they were pan-fried golden brown. The *Bam!* was provided by a dash of cayenne pepper. Picture-perfect visual appeal was matched by appealing taste.

My companion cast a vote for the reigning mayor by ordering the "Tim Murray's Famous & Enormous" beef, mushroom and Guinness pie. As huge as the name is, it was well-matched by the portion size. An oblong bowl was filled with mushrooms, carrots and beef that had been marinated in Guinness stout, all simmered in a rich brown sauce. Then it was topped with a layer of flaky pastry crust and baked golden brown.

We completed our meal by sharing a portion of homemade crème caramel. Eggy and thick, it was served in a pool of caramel sauce.

Few establishments enjoy the popular affection that is reserved for this one, so it's a pleasure to assure you that O'Connor's Restaurant — Worcester's own piece of Ireland — is better than ever. □

Paul Bernard is a pseudonym.