
Peppercorn Grille Fine Dining in Big Bear, Ca. (1/08)

Contributed by Kelly Doherty & Todd Elliot

DINING IN BIG BEAR



When a restaurant tenant suddenly skipped out of town on the location that Mike Hastings built at 553 Pine Knot Avenue his wife Julie said, "let me give it a shot! I'll try my hand at running a restaurant." Boy, did she ever! Four years later, Peppercorn Grille is the most successful restaurant in all of Big Bear Lake. Owner Julie Hastings was born and raised in Big Bear and despite having never run a restaurant before, she knew exactly what Big Bear needed... consistent good food. That is just what Peppercorn Grille provides. They have had the same chef since they opened and offer the finest quality meats, fishes and fine faire. Friends of Julie's in the restaurant business told her to get cheaper meats, buy things in bulk, and to watch her budget. Instead Julie went all out and bought only the freshest ingredients, the best quality food, and with no budget and no experience she wanted to do whatever it took. She offered discounts to locals to create a local following to keep the restaurant afloat during the off-season. Her recipe worked! Peppercorn Grille is consistently packed every night, year round, a rarity in a resort town.

We dropped in for a late dinner and experienced why for ourselves. First off we noticed the line of people without reservations waiting to be seated. This is a popular place with only 14 tables inside and 7 on the patio outside (closed when it's cold out). Be sure to make a reservation. The wait can be up to an hour and a half! The burgundy colored ceiling is accented with chandeliers creating a romantic dim lighting. There are traditional "still life" paintings on the walls and Victorian floral drapery framing the spotlessly clean windows. Nice jazzy background music creates a cozy feeling. There is everything you could ask for on the menu... everything but Mexican food! They have Fish, Angus Steak, Chicken, Lamb, Pork, Pasta, Pizza, Soup, Salads, Appetizers, Cocktails, and 50+ Wines from around the world and Desserts made on the premises. We started our meal with the Artichoke Heart Sauté that was sautéed in olive oil fresh garlic, balsamic vinegar, pepper, breadcrumbs and Romano cheese. This delectable appetizer is nothing but hearts served off the body. No work getting to the artichoke meat here, just eat them up. Nice strong vinegar flavor!

Then we had the seared Ahi tuna. These sliced were thick, seared perfectly! We also tried the Calamari. These were served as steak strips, very lightly fried, drizzled with lemon aioli and served with a spicy tomato sauce, which made us think of mozzarella sticks. Yummy! The house salad was perfectly accented with sunflower seeds to give an extra special flavor. To compliment we had Green Goddess dressing and black cherry vinaigrette. Both were delicious! For the main course we had the Filet of Alaskan Halibut prepared with a Macadamia Nut coating with Black Cherry Chutney and a Sweet potato mash. This fish was so fresh and delicious and the flavorings brought out the essence of the fish without overwhelming it. For dessert we tried the Tiramisu and the Crème Brulee and the delicious Apple-Raisin Bread Pudding, all prepared in the kitchen. What a great way to end the meal! Some other notables on this extensive menu are the variety of steaks and fish, the lobster, the artichoke-spinach stuffed chicken breast, the wild mushroom and spinach lasagna and the variety of pizzas prepared fresh daily made to order in their brick oven. Truly, Peppercorn Grille has it all! They are located In the Village at 553 Pine Knot Avenue in Big Bear Lake. For reservations call (909) 866-5405 and check out their website at www.peppercorngrille.com