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Mown hay meets upscale chic in Wagoner

A canopy of trees over the entrance road and the aroma of new-mown hay greeted us as we made our way for dinner at the Canebrake, an upscale, multifunctional facility located on ranch land four miles east of Wagoner.

Canebrake is a resort with lodging facilities, a restaurant, yoga classes, a ropes course, an Olympic-size indoor sand volleyball court and a panorama of ponds and tree-lined rolling meadows that in winter yield views of Fort Gibson Lake.

We had dinner in the earth-toned, modern dining room, although it was warm enough the evening we were there to have dined on the pretty walled patio with central fountains.

I would have liked — and still would — to have gone for the Sunday brunch buffet, figuring the 45-minute drive and picturesque setting would have made a pleasant outing. But for review purposes, dinner made more sense, and we were able to meet up with four former neighbors from the Fort Gibson Lake area.

We sampled a variety of entrees, and I came away with best memories of the grilled chicken (\$17) and the pan-roasted pork medallions (\$24).

The chicken, rubbed with cilantro, cumin and lime, was tender and had a smoky barbecued flavor, while the pretty but modest-sized serving of pork medallions got a flavor rush from a tasty sage blackberry sauce. The chicken came with mashed purple potatoes and the pork with mashed sweet potatoes.

Pan-seared, molasses-rubbed catfish and fried shoestring potatoes gave the fish and chips (\$17) an Oklahoma twist, and the barbecue-mopped shrimp entree (\$19) took a Southern route with stone-ground grits laced with bleu cheese and basil.

Both the ribeye (\$29) with good grilled corn and fries and the filet mignon (\$34) with tender new potatoes were milder and flavorful enough — even though the filet came out medium instead of medium-rare, as ordered. The sauces that came with them were curious choices.

The dark espresso-chipotle sauce with the ribeye was like a spicy-hot barbecue sauce, for me too overpowering for the beef. The filet called for a brandied shallot sauce, which turned out to be the same espresso-chipotle sauce with a little brandy and sautéed onions thrown in. Both tasted exactly the same.

Co-owner and executive chef Sam Bracken later told us that the sauce on the upcoming fall menu for the filet will be changed to a brandied shallot-butter sauce, which, on paper at least, seems like a more favorable selection.

Bracken makes a strong effort to acquire organically grown or organically fed products, fresh fruits and vegetables from area growers and Oklahoma-made cheeses. These show up in items such as the bison burger, sautéed vegetables, baby spinach salad and spring greens salad.

CANEBRAKE

33241 E. 732nd Road, Wagoner, 485-1807

Food: New American
Price: \$12 (bison burger) to \$34 (filet mignon); Sunday brunch \$21

Credit cards: All major

Hours: 5:30-9 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday

Food: ★★★

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

Service: ★★

(One is fair, two good, three very good and four excellent.)

To get there

From Tulsa, take Oklahoma 51/Broken Arrow Expressway to the Muskogee Turnpike and take the Wagoner exit. Continue on 51 to about four miles east of Wagoner (be prepared for a train delay in downtown Wagoner) and turn north (left) on South 330th Road and follow the Canebrake signs. To avoid the toll road, take the last free exit on the BA Expressway and stay on Oklahoma 51 through Coweta.

The spring greens salad (\$4.50 small, \$6 large) was beautiful, with bright greens, heirloom golden tomatoes, Mandarin oranges, croutons and a tangy pomegranate vinaigrette. An iceberg wedge (\$5.50) might be easy to overlook, but ours was outstanding with apple-smoked bacon, bleu cheese crumbles and a light house dressing.

Between salads and entrees our table also received an amuse bouche, a little surprise, of a tasty artichoke salad.

I'm not always a fan of the big chocolate desserts, but our triple mocha mousse torte (\$9), with a mix of chocolate ganache, mocha mousse and whipped cream on a walnut crust, and a malt chocolate cream pie (\$7), with malt chocolate mousse and mascarpone on a cocoa-shortbread crust, were lavish and sensational.

Strawberry shortcake (\$7) was less successful due to the extra-thick house-made shortcake, which was overly dry and crumbly. A thinner cake with the same texture probably would have worked fine.

The setting

The night we were there the dining room had a modest crowd, but there was a sizable group on the patio, and service was uneven — brisk at times, slow at times.

The kitchen here is as open as it gets, and some regular customers like to reserve one of the 14 seats at the counter facing the kitchen, where they can interact with the cooks and watch the preparations.

Canebrake has full bar service with a variety of specialty drinks. Although by-the-glass pours were modest, the wine list included many impressive labels, more than 50 overall and about half available by the glass.

In addition to Bracken, the restaurant staff includes Karissa Brewer, pastry chef;



The roast duck breast with sage aioli and roasted butter-nut squash will be a new featured item on the fall menu at Canebrake. STEPHEN HOLMAN/Tulsa World

Dan Savala, executive sous chef; and Les Montgomery, kitchen manager.

Bracken's mother, Linda, oversaw the interior design of the restaurant, which includes a separate bar and lounge area, and sleek new bathrooms off the lobby area. Bracken said the entire complex, built over the footprint

of his parents' former horse ranch, was constructed with sustainable building methods, including recycled insulation, organic paint and solar hot water.

A last tip: Take a close look at your bill. Ours included an 18 percent gratuity figured into the total.

Eat and run, more like eat and glide

If you don't want to fight the crowded restaurants and parking before a show at the BOK Center, Lava Noshery has a plan.

Chef Geoffrey van Glabbeek at Lava has created menus for the BOK Center's major concerts for the fall with Dine and Ride with Lava.

Here's the deal: Park at Lava

in Brookside (3512 S. Peoria Ave.), enjoy a \$50 per person dinner, then ride a trolley to and from the front door of the BOK Center.

Reservations are required for the following events:

- 8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 21 — Neil Diamond
- 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 29 — Carrie Underwood

- 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 11 — Eagles
- 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13 — Celine Dion
- 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 19 — Celtic Thunder

Plan a 5 p.m. seating for 7:30 p.m. shows and a 5:30 p.m. seating for 8 p.m. shows.

The menu for the Neil Diamond show has already been

set. It includes roasted beet salad with fried goat cheese and micro greens, sage pork tenderloin, and for dessert, raspberry cream pop — a cream cheese pastry cream with Pop Rock crust.

For reservations, call Lava Noshery at 749-3310.

— Natalie Mikles,
World Scene Writer



Plate of a variety of appetizers at Lava Noshery.

STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World file