

Crystal Cafe an enduring gem

Rating: ★★★★★

By **Sue Mullin**

Blame it on his osso buco.

"He" is chef-owner Klime Kovaceski, and I am in love with the artistry of his classic dishes at Crystal Cafe, a Miami Beach gem with impeccable service and white-linen ambience where he has presided for more than a decade.

Kovaceski's spectacular osso buco is just one example. The Macedonian-born chef's delightful hybrid style draws on the great cuisines of Italy, Eastern Europe and France. Other complex dishes on his menu include saffron-scented bouillabaisse, crispy duck a l'orange, beef stroganoff and grilled calf's liver with onion-veal reduction and applewood bacon. An appetizer of palacsinta, a Hungarian pancake, is plump with scallops, julienned carrots, fresh basil and lobster sauce. Duck breast is sliced into pan-seared medallions and served with a raspberry sauce, a lovely, leek-accented risotto plus a side of garlic-kissed mashed potatoes. Chicken paprikash is whisked to the table in a chafing dish nearly overflowing with chunks of tender chicken in a tomato and red bell pepper sauce seasoned with the finest Szasz Hungarian paprika.

The wine list is remarkably comprehensive, with 174 bottles including more than two dozen by the half bottle. (The full list and menu, including prices, is posted on the restaurant website.) A grand finale seems in order, and Kovaceski doesn't disappoint. From pecan pie, guava mousse, tiramisu, apple pie, berries sabayon and a berry-stuffed palacsinta, we choose the chocolate bombe. It is warm and dark, rich and wonderful, the ice cream laced with custard and pistachios and topped with whipped cream and strawberries. We feel like applauding, but are much too full."

CRYSTAL CAFE

Rating: ★★★★★

By **Lyn Farmer**

"How chef Klime Kovaceski has managed to avoid becoming a household name escapes me. Perhaps it is because his Crystal Cafe, arguably the best restaurant on Miami Beach, is miles from the South Beach bustle and hype. Instead of Caribbean or New American influences, his cuisine is basically continental with Eastern European influences.

Forget the Oxford shirts and chinos that outfit servers at the hot new properties. Kovaceski's precision-trained staff is garbed in crisp black and white and utterly professional in every respect without seeming stuffy or overbearing. They smile when first-time diners enter the restaurant and look amazed and dazzled by the subtle decor more suited to New York's Upper East Side than a mid-Beach thoroughfare.

You can take in the design from a small and pleasant bar at the front of the restaurant and notice that Kovaceski isn't doing anything different from many restaurants, he's just doing it much better. The music is better and softer than many restaurants, the artwork more subtle and attractive and the atmosphere is less mealtime-manic than many dining spots further down the beach."