

A toast to roasts

By JOY ANGELICA SUBIDO
Philstar.com

MANILA—New dining places pleasantly surprise us by serving co-mestibles that unexpectedly summon up nostalgia. The thought ran through my head after a bite of Kenny's Burger. The grilled 100-percent coarse-ground Angus beef brought me back to childhood, when 19th Tee in Baguio City's Camp John Hay was an American concession. Although Kenny's burger lacks the strongly flavored dill pickle of that memory, it somehow tastes and smells "like John Hay." This, alone, is enough to keep me going back to Kenny's Roast and Grill for more.

Kenny's Roast and Grill is the latest incarnation of the franchise, a step up from the popular fast-serve Kenny Rogers Roasters. A homegrown concept and the first of its kind in Asia, it is expectedly more upscale, offers more choices and has a personality all its own. "This is distinct from Kenny Rogers Roasters," clarifies creative consultant Nel Cruz of The Roasters Group. "Aside from expecting to get more than the classics, it is the perfect way to



show how we see the restaurant in the future." Indeed, the modern and attractive look of the restaurant interiors—and a menu that includes items like grilled lamb chops, Norwegian salmon and tiger prawns—indicates that Kenny Rogers is upping the ante with its full-service restaurant.

We started the meal with Cajun buffalo wings (P240), a grilled sausage platter (P180) and soup. The former was just as we liked it—chicken wings lightly coated with batter, not too spicy, and served with crisp celery sticks and a blue cheese dip. Dijon mustard and a tasty potato salad were the perfect accompaniment to the grilled Schublig and Bratwurst sausages, while thick and creamy seafood chowder with clams, shrimp and fish (P100) provided diverse flavors and textures with each delicious mouthful. For P250, Kenny's has a soup and salad bar where health-conscious diners can create their own salad from a variety of buffet choices, and have a fill of the restaurant's soup of the day besides. Diners can also enjoy the soup and salad bar at a discounted price of P150 with an order of any entrée.

Our main entrées soon followed, and the grilled US rib eye (P750) did not disappoint. The meat was perfectly cooked so that it was brown and caramelized on the outside, yet remained pink and juicy within. We opted to forgo the tasty red wine sauce that came with it, the better to enjoy the steak's intrinsic goodness, and were glad we did so. On the other hand, a grilled Norwegian salmon flavored with herbs (P380) turned out to be a generous slice. The accompanying lemon-butter sauce provided additional flavor and moisture. But even on its own, the fish easily passed the test of perfect grilling. The flesh was thoroughly cooked, yet remained moist, soft and flavorful. Certainly, grilling fish can be tricky. A lapse of attention and over-cooking even by just a few minutes can result in a dry product of cardboard-like consistency. Happily, the salmon was proof that someone in the kitchen stayed alert and watchful while grilling on the day of our visit.

Other entrees include baby back ribs (P320), grilled pork chops (P275), grilled tiger prawns (P380) and succulent lamb chops flavored with mustard and rosemary (P650). Pasta choices include seafood primavera, spaghetti Bolognese with meatballs, carbonara and baked ziti. Vegetarians will enjoy the penne pasta with pesto sauce, or roasted vegetable pasta with sun-dried tomatoes, where the vegetables are cooked just right so that they are caramelized, yet remain crisp. We would have liked the arbiatta to be a tad spicier, but understood that most diners tend to prefer the milder version of this linguine pasta with cayenne pepper-spicy tomato sauce. Of course, the quintessential Kenny's classic roast chicken remains a popular alternative. Undoubtedly, however, the varied menu items reinforce the concept restaurant's goal of providing more than just the classics.

"We want to be adventurous," says Nel Cruz. "We want to bring the restaurant to a new level." He playfully describes the new Kenny's Roast and Grill as "Kenny Rogers dressed up to go to the Grammys." We mulled this notion over a dessert order of apple crumble à la mode, fresh fruits with cream and tiramisu, and thought it entirely appropriate. The familiar Kenny Rogers Roasters is comfortable and will always remain a favorite, but we must admit that we really like this new, dressed-up version. It is unmistakably more special. ■

Celebrities Invade Bamboo Bistro



Bamboo Bistro owner Dan Belen with comedian Pooh



Bamboo Bistro owner Dan Belen with his wife and son are joined by singer Jonalyn Viray.



Sexy actress Katrina Halili joins Bamboo Bistro's Dan Belen's wife and son.

It seems that Bamboo Bistro is quickly becoming the most popular hang-out for Filipinos who are out to enjoy fun entertainment and terrific food. The Filipino-themed restaurant located at the West Covina area does not only attract locals, they also attract popular celebrities from the Philippines. Famous comedian Pooh, sexy star Katrina Halili and singer Jonalyn Viray all paid a visit to Bamboo Bistro recently, and for sure, it won't be their last. *Advertising Supplement

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