

Power Lunch: Lobster Bar Sea Grille A Quiet Place To Get Good Food

By Julie Kay

To celebrate the end of his four-year battle with the Rothstein Rosenfeldt Adler trustee, lawyer Robert Buschel took his counsel, Beverly Pohl, for a celebratory lunch at Lobster Bar Sea Grille.

"It's a nice quiet place to get good food," said Buschel, a partner at Buschel Gibbons in Fort Lauderdale and a former lawyer with Scott Rothstein's firm. "I like to be able to talk to someone while I'm eating. And the food is very good."

Open for 2½ months, the restaurant at the site of the former Jackson's Steakhouse at 450 E. Las Olas Blvd. has quickly become a favorite of Fort Lauderdale's power elite. One sure sign: a recent spotting of H. Wayne Huizenga, the uncrowned emperor of Broward County.

The owners, Buckhead Life Restaurant Group of Atlanta, run more than a dozen eateries from Atlanta to South Florida. They spared no expense on their first Fort Lauderdale spot, spending \$3.5 million on a top-to-bottom renovation.

The restaurant was designed to resemble a Paris subway station—

contemporary yet nautical with white tiled walls, lighted arches, a U-shaped bar with comfortable cushioned seats and Art Deco-inspired spherical chandeliers. Others have compared the decor to the experience of dining on a multimillion-dollar yacht.

Most dine indoor. However, there's plenty of cozy outdoor cushioned seating under a covered patio for nighttime or private tete-a-tetes.

As they're guided to their seats, diners pass what is undoubtedly the central focus of the room—a gigantic ice display of lobsters, crabs and every manner of fish in front of the chef's station.

Pano Karatassos, founder and CEO of the restaurant group, said he had eaten at Jackson's and decided to open the Lobster Bar there after it closed.

"I knew it was an iconic location, and that's a plus in any city," he said. "The customers that come in here were at Jackson's at one time or another."



PHOTOS BY MELANIE BELL

While Lobster Bar Sea Grille features Art Deco-inspired chandeliers, above, it's the fresh seafood—such as the tuna, left—that the restaurant is known for.

BUSINESS MEETINGS

While dinner and happy hour have taken off, lunch is developing slowly through word of mouth. "We get 80 to 110 people at lunch," Karatassos said. "That's a good number for us. It pays the light bill."

While the steak and wedge salad does mighty well at lunch, it's no surprise that seafood is king. Karatassos said the company has long-established relationships with European suppliers.

The most popular item on the lunch menu is the seared tuna nicoise, a white rectangular plate filled with neat rows of sliced tuna, beans, tomatoes, potatoes, eggs and roasted peppers for \$17. Also popular are the salmon salad club with rows of sauteed Scottish salmon, baby artichoke, corn planks, hearts of palm and avocado, also for \$17, and the colossal lump crab salad with deviled egg for \$19.

On a recent visit, I had the salmon salad club and found it light and fresh—yet filling—lunch. My lunch companion, Tammy Knight, a Fort Lauderdale partner at Holland & Knight and head of the firm's women's initiative, ordered the chopped cocktail shrimp and jumbo lump crab chopped salad. Under doctor's orders to have a light lunch before a stress test offered to lawyers at the firm, Knight did a double take when the enormous salad arrived and could only eat half.

Jeffrey Ostrow, managing partner of Kopelowitz Ostrow Ferguson Weiselberg Keechl in Fort Lauderdale, has been to Lobster Bar five times already—three times for lunch, once for dinner and once for a happy hour his firm hosted. He pronounces it "a good restaurant for business meetings."

Ostrow met his financial adviser, Stefan Pastor of Provenance Wealth Advisors, as well as a client, Daniel Gregory, CEO of Team Enterprises.

"I've been fixated on the salmon, which is a nice light lunch," Ostrow said. "I think it's formal but not too stuffy. The servers make it more casual, and comfortable."

Pastor, whose office is directly across the street, said his lunch options on Las Olas are ever increasing, ranging from Asia Bay to Subway.

"I think there are an abundance of options these days—almost too many," Pastor said. "Looking at it from a business perspective, these restaurants are starting to cannibalize each other."

'A BIT PRICEY'

Pastor, who hails from the Northeast, took to Lobster Bar, which reminds him of Grand Central Station at first sight.

"I've been there three times," he said. "Everything I've had there has been excellent—the lobster roll, the sea bass—and the wait staff is getting better."

Pastor noted the place can be "a bit pricey."

"You can spend a couple hundred dollars on lunch," he said.

The lobster roll comes in at \$19, two-pound steamed lobster at \$50 and three-pound steamed lobster at \$75.

Pohl, a partner at Broad & Cassel, also remarked the eatery is a tad expensive, remarking, "You're not going to go there a couple times a week, unless you're Wayne Huizenga."

Still, Pohl, who has lunched there three times, plans to return, calling it "a classy place for lunch." She raves about the char-grilled Mediterranean octopus appetizer, served with olive oil, Santorini capers and pickled red onions, for \$16.

"It's a serious restaurant," she said. "It's airy and light and elegant. And the bar has nice comfortable chairs, perfect for happy hour. On a Friday night, who feels like standing up any more?"

While restaurants tend to come and go on Las Olas, **Jamie Cole, managing partner of Weiss Serota Helfman Pastoriza Cole & Boniske**, thinks Lobster Bar is here to stay. The chairman of the Florida Association of Managing Partners had a recent lunch meeting there with Joel Goren of SunTrust and Barbara Libertore Black and Matthew Cheezem of Cresa Partners LLC to discuss sponsorship of the group's upcoming meeting.

"There's a lot of competition now, that's for sure," **Cole said**. "But the food is extremely good, and it's quick. Even if you only have an hour or an hour and 10 minutes, you can get in and out. I think it will definitely last."