

# LET'S EAT Dinner at Cork is a fine way to cap an evening

By JACK WINNER  
CORRESPONDENT

Fittingly, the new restaurant Cork sits atop the Bottle Shop, with which it shares a building overlooking St. Armands Circle. In this upstairs/downstairs arrangement, the lower Bottle Shop assumes casual duty, acting as a bar, cafe and wine store, while Cork pursues more ambitious -- and quite pricey -- culinary efforts.

The look at Cork is modern and minimalist with bare wood surfaces and a lot of gleaming metal. This scheme extends to the table as well, where diners will find sleek flatware and dishes that might be square, oval or rectangular. A terrace also provides a nice view of the Circle and foot traffic below. Our waiter called the Parmesan Black Pepper Biscuits (\$10) "the cutest appetizer in town." And they are. Like so many things miniature, the four nickel-sized biscuits exuded charm.

Along with the cheese and pepper, each biscuit also had a sliver of Bayonne ham (France's best-known dried variety) and a dab of mayonnaise -- in other words, a rather chic ham sandwich.

Lamb Kidneys (\$11) proved much more substantial than the biscuits. The kidneys sat on a hefty bed of roasted potatoes and onions. Kidneys can be tricky; if not handled well they can be dry and rubbery, but these had been cooked with care. The outsides were just firm to the touch, and the insides were moist and pungent. The potatoes and onions made a good foil for the robust taste of the kidneys.

Cork offers a number of seafood dishes, including some not widely found on menus around town, such as the Roasted Sablefish Gribiche (\$29) and Bronzini "Miller's Wife," i.e., meuniere (\$39).

Bronzini, a Mediterranean fish apparently catching on as one of the latest trendy food items, tastes somewhat like a red snapper. The two small fillets were perfectly cooked and received a minimum of embellishment, just a few hazelnuts and some chopped apple, which went quite well with the fish.



CAPTION FOR FOOD SHOT NEEDED

Cacciucco hails from Livorno and is one of those port dishes, like bouillabaisse, that originally took advantage of fishermen's daily catches. This is hearty fare good for warding off the chill of the sea and has that "stick-to-your ribs" quality. Built on a tomato base, this version (\$32) strayed from its Italian roots to add chorizo and what tasted like a hint of smoked pepper. This resulted in a smoky, peppery backdrop, more sauce than broth, to the generous servings of seafood.

Cork serves vegetables as side dishes. Potato Mont d'Or (\$6), which added cheese to whipped potatoes, was a bit dry, while the Haricots Verts (\$7) -- thin, crispy French string beans -- were expertly prepared.

In a whimsical variation on a Florida standard, key lime pie

becomes a Grapefruit Tart (\$10), a substitution that works well. A Chocolate Souffle (\$14) turned out splendidly, light and airy as a cloud, with the rich chocolate flavor further enhanced by a brandy cream sauce.

As might be expected, Cork has a wide selection of wines. Our waiter, however, was uninformed, even about ones listed as Cork specials, and seemed unable to find someone who could answer our questions.

## [REVIEW]

### Cork

29 N. Boulevard of Presidents, St. Armands Circle, Sarasota. Open 5:30 to 10 p.m. daily. Wheelchair-accessible (elevator for upstairs). Most major credit cards accepted. 388-1675.