

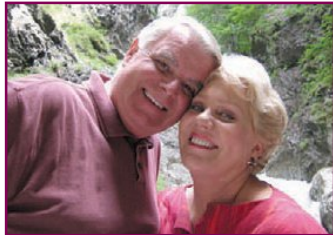


*Executive Chef Brian Whitmer*

## Character's Bar & Grill At The Marriott Hotel In Napa

### Character's Bar & Grill

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BY DOROTHY & JOHN SALMON

**S**ince John was born and raised in the Midwest and loves everything either fried or barbecued, we decided to try the new barbecue at the Marriott Hotel at 3425 Solano Avenue, just off the Redwood/Trancas exit on Highway 29 in Napa. The Hotel was purchased earlier this year by Privet Investments, LLC and Lighthouse Lodging Group, LLC, who have plans for a multi-million dollar remodel under the leadership of the hotel's new general manager, Shawn Milburn.

We recently attended the annual Chamber of Commerce Economic Forecast held at the hotel. On our way home, we both commented how good the food was and had overheard many

others making the same comment. You don't often hear those comments in a hotel meeting where food is served to a group approaching 200 in number. We were impressed with the quality of the food, the interesting dishes and the friendly atmosphere at the Marriott. It was not typical hotel food.

So, on a recent weekday night, we took grandson Wil (age 2) and granddaughter Arden (age 5) to try out Character's Bar and Grill at the hotel. Character's is one of two restaurants at the Marriott. The other restaurant, the Harvest Café, showcases California cuisine. The shift to a barbecue style at Character's was prompted by the hotel's new Executive Chef, Brian Whitmer. Chef Brian is showcasing

his Kansas City roots by utilizing local and seasonal ingredients to create simple, delicious dishes that blend his barbecue-charged background with his highly celebrated gourmet restaurant experiences. This is good news for Napa!

Chef Brian Whitmer began his career under Chef Bradley Ogden at Kansas City's famed American Restaurant before moving on to New York's Tavern on the Green, Montrachet and The Polo Club, where he worked with culinary genius Daniel Boulud. Brian moved to the Bay Area in 1989 to team up with Chef Bradley Ogden in opening San Francisco's Campton Place Hotel. He also spent six years as Executive Chef at the Highland Inn in Carmel. In the small world category, it was Hawthorn Realty Group, the real estate firm in Chicago who John then worked with, that first rehabilitated and remodeled the Highlands Inn in the 1970's.

Appropriately, the barbecue menu at Character's offers a casual menu entitled "Brian's American Barbecue." The menu features barbecue classics such as St. Louis ribs, smoked and slow-cooked pork butt and Texas brisket sandwiches.

For our dinner on this evening, Dorothy had the Smoked Chicken Cobb Salad (\$12.50) with Hickory smoked chicken breast, bacon, avocado, tomatoes, egg and Point Reyes blue cheese, mustard vinaigrette. John had his usual small Caesar Salad (\$7) and a Half Slab of Baby Back Ribs (\$10). The children went for the more traditional kid's menu. Arden had a Hot Dog (\$3.25) and Wil went for the Cheese Pizza (\$5.95). For dessert, Brian brought out a plate of his

Chocolate Chip cookies which finished off the meal perfectly. Character's new look features BBQ themed art on the walls and new tables and chairs. On the night were there, the traditional sports bar atmosphere existed with several flat screen TV's and the grandkid's favorite, the pool table, which kept them entertained after dinner.

John considers himself an expert on BBQ Baby Back Ribs and Brian's rank high on his list. The kids showed their approval by clearing their plates.

Another reason we are doing this review is to celebrate the renewed community involvement by the Napa Valley Marriott Hotel and Spa. It recently hosted the first of a planned annual event, "Brian's Back-to-School Barbeque," a fundraising celebration of food, beverage and community at Character's Bar & Grill that featured local chefs, wineries, breweries and live music. Taking part as event guest chefs were our good friend and long-time community supporter, Greg Cole, of Cole's Chop House and Celadon; Toni Chiappetta, of Sweetie Pies Bakery; and Michael Gyetvan, of Azzurro Pizzeria e Enoteca (and the soon-to-open Norman Rose Tavern), all from Downtown Napa. Chef Brian and the entire staff at the Marriott are doing their best to encourage families to dine with them and enjoy the friendly atmosphere in the hotel that many of us drive past regularly on Highway 29.

Next time you are considering where to go for dinner with your family and friends, stop by Character's Bar and Grill and experience great, reasonably priced barbeque.

## **Characters Bar & Grill Smoked Salmon Tart**

*Serves 4*

### **Ingredients:**

- 12 oz smoked salmon
- 4 - 4" puff pastry discs, weighted and baked
- 4 red radishes, thinly sliced
- 4 sprigs dill, coarsely chopped
- 2 small Yukon Gold Potatoes, steamed and diced ½-inch
- 1 bunch each watercress and frisee, cleaned and dried
- 2 ounces Citrus Vinaigrette
- 2 ounces Lemon-Horseradish sour cream

### **To assemble:**

Place puff pastry disc in the middle of each plate. Combine salmon, greens, dill potatoes and radishes and toss gently with vinaigrette, and mound on top of pastry disc. Drizzle horseradish cream across the top and serve immediately.

### **Citrus Vinaigrette:**

Combine 3 T orange juice, 2 T lemon juice and 2 T white balsamic vinegar, and whisk in a half cup olive oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

### **Lemon-Horseradish**

#### **Sour Cream:**

Combine one-third cup sour cream with 1 T horseradish and 2½ T fresh lemon juice and season with salt to taste.

### ***Bon Appétit!***

Brian Whitmer  
Executive Chef, Napa Valley  
Marriott Hotel and Spa