

# Melvyn's chic style carries over to the food, service

**BACKGROUND:** Melvyn's is what "21" is to New York, the place to see and be seen. It just so happens the cuisine is on par with the cachet.

The enduring charm of this desert classic has resulted in numerous awards, from recognition for fine dining to celebrity sightings.

Locals gravitate here and enjoy the clublike ambiance. The bar is chic and seldom dull. Dining is a continuation of personalized, attentive service.

The historical background of the Ingleside Inn is a story in itself. Frank Sinatra celebrated his pre-wedding dinner in the dining room, which hasn't changed an iota.

While new restaurants open with Zen-like interiors, Melvyn's clings to the past, unabashedly. Music is mellow, no jolting hard rock sounds to compete with dinner conversation.

The staff is decked out in tuxedos and the crowd is well-heeled. Mel Haber, the owner, has gathered enough stories about the inn to fill a book. In fact, he authored one that tells all.

**RESTAURANT:** The narrow entrance is barely wide enough for a car, but that's the charm of simply arriving here. Valet service is streamlined and you never know who you'll rub shoulders with once you've arrived. Goldie Hawn? John Travolta? The feeling of old Palm Springs thrives at Melvyn's.

Sundays are reserved for jam sessions, 3 p.m.-7 p.m. We stopped by for the jazz and stayed for dinner.

**MENU:** We always enjoy being greeted by charming Maitre d' Brian Ellis, who has been receiving guests here for over 20 years.

We were seated at a corner table and relished the soft lighting and spacious seating. The selection of appetizers, soups and salads is extensive, and predictably good.

There were no complaints on the chilled large shrimp (\$11) served with a tangy sauce and lemon slice. However, you should not deny yourself the pleasure of the hot spinach salad for two (\$12), which is prepared tableside, with serious pride. The leaves are slightly wilted, retaining just enough strength. The hot bacon vinegar dressing is not overwhelming. The presentation is the most theatrical for a spinach salad I've seen to



FRED FIGUEROA, THE DESERT SUN

## MELVYN'S RESTAURANT

### HOW IT RATES

**Melvyn's Restaurant and Lounge**  
at the Ingleside Inn  
200 West Ramon Road  
Palm Springs  
325-2323

**Hours:** From 6 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. daily

**Prices:** ★★★★★

**Rating:** ★★★★★

**Ambiance:** ★★★★★

**Service:** ★★★★★

★ Poor	\$ \$10 or less
★★ Fair	\$ \$10-\$19
★★★ Good	\$ \$20-\$35
★★★★ Excellent	\$ \$35 or more

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date.

There are so few restaurants in this new age of fusion confusion that serve tableside, and although this is a nod to the pre-nouvelle cuisine era, it's nice to know it's respected at Melvyn's.

The French onion soup (\$5) is rich and not for calorie counters. The Gruyere cheese is crusty and the croutons toasted.

We ordered the fresh whitefish (\$24) grilled and served with mango sauce. It was a large portion balanced with a tantalizing sauce. The Steak Diane (\$26), expertly seasoned and tender, was another tableside presentation, finished with shallots, french mustard and a red wine demiglace.

Reluctantly we passed on the Norwegian salmon pan fried, which was enhanced by ouzo, artichoke hearts and diced tomatoes (\$25) and the chicken breast supreme (\$22) stuffed with sundried tomatoes, goat cheese and spinach.

And that is the crux of the problem; what to order with so many fine choices on the menu. This is precisely why those who seek fine dining recognize the consistent quality, returning to Melvyn's like the swallows to

Capistrano.

Desserts are more than an afterthought. Although the cheesecake is rich without being too sweet, I still prefer the spectacular soufflé. Right now Gran Marnier is the only variety served and it must be ordered in advance. The soufflé arrived warm from the oven, and we both agreed it about as near to heaven a dessert can get. We tried the coffee di sarrano, served in snifter and coffee on the side (\$7.50).

**FINAL THOUGHTS:** A desert original, Melvyn's bows to the past with well-rehearsed service, candlelight and class. The menu doesn't present anything outrageous, so if you like experimental combinations, you'll have to seek this out elsewhere. From the extensive wine list to the stellar soufflé, Melvyn's personifies the image and glamour of Palm Springs at its best.

**Table for Two** is an anonymous review. The reviewer is a Coachella Valley resident who has published columns and books on food and entertainment topics and is a member of the California Restaurant Writers Association. All expenses for the reviewer are paid by The Desert Sun.