

Restaurant Review

Sophistication in downtown Bradenton. It's the kind of place that makes you feel like you're in a much bigger city. When you read the owner/chef's credentials you'll understand why.

So Much at SoMa

I actually had something happen during my experience at Soma Creek Side Restaurant that's never happened before—and it broadened my horizon. The waitress didn't hear what I had ordered and brought out something entirely different, something I wouldn't have thought to order. But when it arrived, I said, "Let me try this." It was a brilliant mistake.



I said "mahi" but she thought I said "ahi" and I wound up having a different kind of seafood meal. Let me recommend the ahi tuna hibachi with shrimp-jasmine fried rice, pea shoots and passion fruit ponzu (\$27). Erin also enjoyed her Florida lobster bisque with coconut, curry and cilantro (\$8) followed by pork rib-eye grilled spiced maple glazed with brussel sprouts and cheddar hash (\$22). There are also plenty of appetizers (\$4-\$16) and salads (\$7-\$13) to enjoy as well.

There's a wide selection of wine from around the world and the prices are reasonable. Glasses average \$8, bottles range from \$25 to \$70.

We each had a dessert shot, something I wish more restaurants would do. Just a few bites, not enough time for guilt to set in. I had dark and white chocolate, coconut-salt caramel mousse and Erin had a raspberry swirl cheesecake (\$5). Larger desserts are also available—guava pound cake or white chocolate mousse (\$9).

"Soma" is simply a cool place and cozy (50 seats). It's dimly lit, which always adds to an atmosphere. Big windows line the walls, looking out on busy Manatee Avenue West. Parking couldn't be easier in the nearly attached garage next door. Directions from Sarasota are easy: Drive north on US 41 (41 is called 14th St. in Bradenton).

The man behind it all is Dave Shiplett. He was born and raised in Bradenton but then headed west to San Francisco where he learned cooking and customer service. He attended culinary school in the heart of the city. His mantra, "People eat with their eyes: if it's beautiful, then it's compelling." He never loses sight of that. The name of the restaurant came from San Francisco—"Soma" is a contraction for "South of Market Street." (Just like New York's "SoHo" is after "South of Houston Street.")

"Soma" also has an extensive lunch menu that includes appetizers, flat bread pizza, sandwiches and main courses (\$5-\$24). They also do parties on the premises and catering.

If you want to go out in downtown Bradenton and feel like you're a world away, head to Soma Creek Side.
RAY COLLINS

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