

SOUTH JERSEY LIVING

LIFESTYLES &gt;&gt; DINING

# Bonefish Grill turns long wait into pleasant interlude

By **BILL REINHARDT**  
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Would you wait an hour for a table in a chain restaurant? I hate to admit it to the world, but we did — after walking away from a 90-minute wait at a top-notch inn a half-hour away.

The situation: It's 7:30 Saturday night and, if we hang around we won't set fork to food until about 9 p.m. in Franklin Township. So we motor back up Del-sea Drive to the **Bonefish Grill** in Deptford. Of course, it's standing room only there, too.

But it's only a 60-minute wait. Let's see: It's now 8 o'clock. That means we won't set fork to food until ... 9 p.m.! Geez! It's Franklin Township all over again!

One query: Doesn't *anybody* eat at home on Saturday night?

In the long run, it turns out for the better. We're 25 miles closer to home and if you absolutely have to wait an hour for a table the Bonefish Grill is a grand place to do it.

Thronged? There's almost a line out the revolving door — “a big city look,” says proprietor Marvin Mack during a follow-up phone conversation — yet the horde is unfed, not unruly.

The fact is these folks are more party than pushy. That's because the Bonefish Grill makes it easy to de-stress. Servers take drink orders (there are a dozen different martinis in the \$6.50 range, wines by the glass and beer). Thanks to a glass of crisp, clear Bridgeview Blue Moon Riesling (\$5.50), I'm softening by the second, while my date nurses a sangria mango (\$5) which, she says, tastes as tropically good as it sounds.

Occasionally, a server wanders through with hors d'oeuvre. If you're lucky, as we are, it'll be the eatery's signature bang bang shrimp dish. The creamy, spicy sauce will make your mouth tingle joyously.

We park ourselves in a corner bench and mellow out. Even the hand-picked music helps make this chain restaurant with a heart easy to take.

At 9:01, shortly after being seated, we dive into appetizers. My unabashedly plump scallops (\$9.90) sport crisp bacon and mouth-awakening mango salsa chutney. Just as tantalizing are coconut-crusted shrimp (\$7.90) accompanied by a dipping sauce that marries orange marmalade and horseradish sooooo well.

## REVIEW

Bonefish Grill  
1709 Deptford Center Road  
Deptford  
(856) 848-6261

■ **Cuisine:** Fresh fish and others

■ **Overall:** ★★★★★ (very good)

■ **Food:** ★★★★★

■ **Ambience:** ★★★★★½

■ **Value:** ★★★★★

■ **Service:** ★★★★★½

■ **Cost:** Pricey. Appetizers: \$5.90 to \$14.90; salads: \$5.20 to \$9.90; entrees: \$13.20 to \$32; desserts: \$5.70 to 6.20

■ **Accommodations:** Reservations suggested, especially on weekends. Wheelchair accessible. All major credit cards accepted.

■ **Recommended dishes:**

Bacon-wrapped sea scallops, coconut crusted shrimp, pistachio

Parmesan-crusted rainbow trout, gulf grouper, bananas Foster, Key lime pie

■ **Hours:** Mondays through Thursdays, 4 to 10:30 p.m.; Fridays, 4 to 11:30 p.m.; Saturdays, 3 to 11:30 p.m.; Sundays, 2 to 10 p.m.

■ **What the stars mean:** Five stars is excellent, four stars is very good, three stars is good, two stars is fair, one star is poor.

Chef Stephanie Dickey's velvety corn chowder with lump crab meat (\$6.50 a bowl, \$5.70 a cup) would be perfectly acceptable without the corn. With it there's a sweetness and distinctive flavor. I'm recommending; my date's thumb is slightly down, however.

Owner Mack confesses to “trying to present a little polish and offering some elements of fine dining,” even though his establishment is part of a chain. Mack and the designers of the 6-month-old restaurant have hit it out of the park. Just enough light indirectly illuminates dark wooden floors that stand out between beige walls. A black ceiling impresses. The large room is remarkably quiet, even though most of its 265 seats are occupied.

Those who appreciate fish have an advantage here. Ten selections make up the “grilled fish” category and other seafood creations are dotted among the “grilled specialties” and “saute.”

My sizable gulf grouper filet is superior, thanks to the establishment's oak wood-burning grill and an exceptional lime tomato garlic sauce. A trio of other sauces — lemon butter, warm

mango salsa and pan-Asian style — also can be paired with any of 10 fish selections. Add palette-priming potatoes au gratin from the “awesome sidelines” category (also garlic mashed potatoes, angel hair pasta with marinara sauce, island rice or steamed vegetable medley) and my meal is worth the wait.

How fantastic does pistachio Parmesan-crusted rainbow trout sound? Chef Dickey knows it wouldn't take much to overpower my date's delicate rainbow trout (\$16.60), and she's careful to pull it off. Each individual ingredient comes through with every forkful.

Landlubbers shouldn't go away disappointed, either. Pork, chicken and beef dishes are constants on the menu and a short list of specials changes nightly.

Eyebrows will arch, guaranteed, at first sight of the massive bananas Foster dessert (\$6.20). We couldn't finish the soft, warm bananas, sweet-gooey caramel sauce and double scoops of vanilla ice cream. Of course, we were at a disadvantage, having first shared a hefty slice of home-crafted ultra-lemony Key lime pie (\$5.70) in graham cracker and pecan crust.

We spend almost \$80 on the nose, not including a well-

earned tip for quality service. Prices at the Bonefish are slightly more aggressive than run-of-the-mill chain stops, but the smoothness and sophistication makes it all worthwhile, even on a jam-packed Saturday night.

Even that aspect won't come into play next time: the Bonefish Grill accepts reservations even on Saturday nights, when *nobody* stays home.

Bill Reinhardt is a veteran restaurant critic. He has worked for the Courier-Post for 37 years and is currently an editor in the Features Department. Reach him at (856) 486-2439 or breinhardt@courierpostonline.com