

Styer's Garden Café

A hidden gem of a restaurant, Styer's Garden Café is set in an antique greenhouse at Terrain in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The walk from the parking area to the café is a treat in and of itself. You can stroll through the store and browse among gourmet food items, cookbooks, candles, terrariums, table settings, and bath products. Or, you can follow the path through the nursery to check out the outside décor, which, at this time of year, will include pumpkins and gourds of all shapes and sizes, as well as colorful pepper plants and ornamental cabbage.

Arriving at the café, you will enter a conservatory of tables covered in linen tablecloths where the horticulture, lighting, and friendly servers create the most serene and pleasant dining atmosphere in the area. Unlike many restaurants where poor acoustics prevent you from hearing the person across from you, Styer's Garden Café arranges the tables and greens to provide a peaceful and private surrounding.

The ever changing seasonal menu offers a taste for every palate. I dined there on two occasions in the early fall — the first was with my husband Vincent and two friends and the second was just the two of us.

Our favorite appetizer was the Doe Run Hummingbird Cheese served with pickled farm beets and micro greens. This soft ripened mild cheese from Doe Run Dairy in Chester County paired perfectly with the tartness of the pickled beets. The colors in this dish were lovely — the red and gold beets, the creamy white cheese and the splash of green. We also enjoyed a fall salad of roasted squash and arugula topped with blue cheese, candied walnuts, cranberries, balsamic and sunchoke crisps.

On one visit, we focused on the seafood entrées, while on the other, we opted for the meat dishes. Overall, the seafood choices prevailed. The grilled whole branzino was superb. The skin was crispy, and the bed of toasted farro, pickled heirloom tomatoes, fennel, and toasted almonds on which it was served was the ideal complement to the mild taste and flaky texture of the fish.

We also ordered the lobster three ways — butter poached tail, knuckle and radish salad, and tempura fried claw. Typically, poached lobster would not entice me, but the variety of preparations (especially the tempura claw!) along with the cauliflower vadouvan, a curry spice blend with a French flair, made this a noteworthy dish. The only minor problem with the plating was the lack of a plate — it was served on a wood board that permitted the melted butter to run over the sides.

Of the meats on the menu, we chose the pork duo of braised cheeks and crispy belly and the braised lamb neck. The duo was served with roasted Brussels sprouts, crispy polenta, hazelnuts, and fig and cider jus — a side dish of true comfort food. The braised cheeks were cooked to perfection, falling apart at the push of a fork. The belly, on the other hand, was not sufficiently rendered to melt in your mouth.

As a result, the meat was tough and required forceful cutting to attempt a taste.

The braised lamb neck with local mushroom ragout, maple glazed squash steak, and spicy carrot harissa made for a much better main course. The lamb was tender, the “steak” had a sweet maple crust, and the harissa added an agreeable spice flavor.



For dessert, we enjoyed the generous cheese board of five local cheeses, including Nancy's Hudson Valley Camembert and Rogue River Smokey Blue, along with honeycomb, quince paste, and crostinis. Ordering a cheese board for dessert is just the thing to do to finish your final few sips of wine.

Last, but not least, I must mention one of the highlights of the meal — the bread. So many restaurants do not pay enough attention to the quality of the bread, while the bread makes one of the restaurant's first impressions. The bread at Styer's Garden Café is meant to impress, and it succeeds.

It is a soft, buttery brioche baked in a clay flower pot accompanied with fresh butter and a unique salt — lavender or sage, for example.

Its tranquil setting and quality ingredients make Styer's Garden Café difficult to beat. The fact that you can BYOB is an added bonus, making for a reasonable night out. As the café also serves brunch and lunch, there is no excuse not to stroll through the store and nursery and then stay for a comforting meal. 🍷



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