

# Macaroni Grill is fun, affordable cuisine

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Staff writer

I didn't think there was a restaurant that could compete with Famous Dave's and its locally famous usual two-hour wait — until now. No, there's not another woody rib joint at South Pointe. The new restaurant at 27th and Pine Lake prides itself on grilled macaroni. Sort of.

I meticulously scrutinized the menu at Macaroni Grill for a dish implied in its moniker, but thankfully never found it. Grilled macaroni sounds like something a mom-and-pop store would put on the menu to sound fancy. But while perusing the list, I did find a litany of real Italian dishes that whetted my appetite. But this was all while sitting at the bar waiting for a table at 9:30, buzzer in hand.

Luckily we managed to get a table before the restaurant closed, and the experience began. Right away the servers brought a jug (not a bottle) of the house Chianti and set it on our table. No, we weren't celebrating a birthday. Every table gets a jug and each person is instructed to keep track of how many glasses they drink. It sounded classy and trustworthy at first, but I imagine it frees up the wait staff to concentrate on more important things. Either way, it's a unusual for a family restaurant.

We ordered an appetizer and took in the surroundings. In a word, it was loud. But not in an annoying way — it was fun. Besides the fact that it had just opened and every chair and ottoman was occupied by a body, the layout of the restaurant creates a high-volume environment.

The open kitchen was packed with the hustle of the wait staff and the bustle of the chefs, giving us a look behind the menu.

The rest of the dining room is just as busy, filled with servers dressed in sharp, clean outfits in a general atmosphere of classy fun. Our service was great, except our waiter got a little too caught up in the place, taking on his best effort at a "Goodfellas" accent that was quite poor. But he rushed our food to us quickly, so I didn't mind the attempt at Italian.

The menu is quite extensive, offering seven chicken dishes, pizza and six seafood dishes with fish from New Zealand. The Gambretti e Pinoli combined the squishy shrimp and mushrooms with crunchy pine nuts on pasta with a light lemon sauce. The Pasta Milano was heartier — a far-falli dish topped with tender

chicken, tomatoes and mushrooms.

Each dish at Macaroni Grill is large enough that you'll have leftovers or can split an entrée. A downside is that everything at the Grill is a la carte, so it adds up. And remember: this place is classy, quick and congenial at a price — a couple can easily spend \$50 without ordering one of the Grill's belt-loosening desserts.

Macaroni Grill has locations in 36 states, Canada, Mexico, and England, with an Australian location coming soon. It started in Leon Springs, Texas and has its headquarters in Dallas. But try not to let the Grill's longhorn heritage dissuade you from a visit — put down your Husker pride for just one meal.

The key to Macaroni Grill's success is that they realize they can't be everybody's best friend.

**REVIEW**

**MACARONI GRILL**

**WHERE:** 27th and Pine Lake Road

**WHAT:** Italian fine dining, \$15 to 30

**BOTTOM LINE:** Classy, fun, vibrant and tasty

The manager doesn't talk to every customer; they know you're there to dine, not to be treated like family (see other national chains). Macaroni Grill is classy, fun, vibrant and tasty. And it will stay that way a year from now.

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