



DESTINATION DINING

MERIDIAN

Restaurant & Bar

Story & Photos by
Elizabeth Musgrave

Above: Appetizer of beets with Capriole Farms goat cheese, navel oranges and candied walnuts.

Dining *Al Fresco*, by its very definition – Italian for outdoors – brings to mind a casual party atmosphere. This is not lost on the Indianapolis restaurant pillar, Meridian Restaurant & Bar. Nestled among the homes in the affluent, northside neighborhood, which includes the governor's mansion, the home-turned-fine-dining establishment blends in nicely with its woodsy surroundings.

The outdoor eating area offers views of a lush park while the breeze on the patio plays havoc with your schedule, creating a desire to settle in and forget other afternoon or evening plans. Lighted umbrellas give a gentle glow to accompany the moonlight or provide shade during sunlight hours. Candlelight grants a romantic feel, while the glow of firelight issues warmth during the cool weather.

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Meridian Restaurant & Bar

- Location: 5694 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis
- Chef: Layton Roberts
- Cuisine: American infused with Asian, French low-country and Middle Eastern influences.
- Price: \$\$\$\$
- Hours: Lunch, Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; Dinner, Monday-Thursday, 5-9:30 p.m., Friday & Saturday, 5-10:30 p.m., Sunday, 4-9 p.m.
- Contact: MeridianonMeridian.com
- Inside scoop: Complimentary valet service (gratuity welcome), Gluten-free items noted on menu
- Reservations recommended



Above: Dato's Apple Pie. Right: Potato gnocchi with white bean and Pancetta.



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An interior boasts rustic elegance and charm with dark wood, timbers and soft lighting. Fireplaces are available indoors or out retaining the intimate mood.

Taking familiar ingredients and jazzing them up is Roberts' specialty. Adding in his own personal zest brings touches from his background of working with low-country French, Middle Eastern and old-fashioned comfort foods. Arriving at Meridian from the Circle City's popular Mesh on Mass, the chef made it a point to retain the client menu favorites while inserting soon-to-be favorites from his own culinary black bag of magic. Including beets.

Beets? Yes, beets. Chef slow-roasts and pairs them with Capriole Farms goat cheese, navel oranges, candied walnuts and gastrique for an appetizer big enough to share (\$10.25). Also on the list are potato gnocchi with Swiss chard, tomato, pancetta, Parmesan and balsamic drizzle (\$11.50).

Bourbon Ginger Ice is a perfect choice anytime, but particularly during September's National Bourbon Month. Arriving in martini stemware, the shaved slivers provide a unique palate cleanser.

Scallops (\$28.75) are served with baby whole carrots, English peas and a sweet and spicy nage (seafood broth). The side of Stilton Panzanella (\$5.50) was, once again, served in ample portion with the intention of table-sharing.

The personality of the establishment is best realized by knowing Raymond "Ray Ray" Rains. The maître d' has more than a slight familiarity with Meridian as he has been employed there since before the opening. Whether on hand to suggest a dessert or wine choice, Rains ensures the comfort of his guests, including more well known names such as Gov. Mitch Daniels, Colts owner Jim Irsay and local and visiting celebrities such as Alec Baldwin, seeking a fine meal away from the downtown Indy spotlight restaurants.

Whether you're a foodie who prefers the trendy or the traditional, dessert may be a difficult choice. Numerous choices are available, including the Dato's Apple Pie (\$8.75) consisting of a phyllo 'bag' full of apples and a slight twist: kiwis. Crowning the American beauty is a caramel drizzle. Tradition remains on the revamped menu with the must-have mini doughnuts and malted coffee cream (\$7.75). Although sources at the eatery say the cream *can* be used as a topping, they readily admit that, "all the cool kids dip." 🐼

Elizabeth Musgrave is an entertainment writer for M Magazine.



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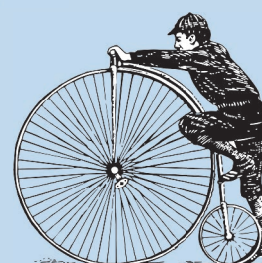


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