

ELEPHANT BAR AND GRILL

APRIL 6, 2008

Dropped into the Elephant Bar and Grill this Friday after one of those terrible medical procedures that leave you wishing for several stiff ones lined up at the bar right afterwards. The EBG happens to squat right there in that improbable collection of *chic* and *coutour* on the border of Ikea's terrible empire in Emeryville, a totally manufactured arrangement of shops and wierd open spaces that ensure rapid movement rather than leisurely dawdling. Could be the gale force winds that whip through the area as well as the bass-enhanced music that implies a live band somewhere.

In any case, the parking is reasonable, given that one has no choice other than to use the garage, and the Elephant proved to rise above the worst expectations of MallAmerica. The restaurant itself is part of a chain, and therefore worth regarding somewhat askance. The atmosphere is that of UFO Abduction in the circular bar area with its lavender lighting, and of English Gentleman's Club in the dining area, with its life-sized replica of a bush elephant emerging from the palm fronds.

Okay, so its kitschy and theme-oriented. Done with that.

The real surprise was in the excellent service - smack fast on Friday afternoon -- and in the above average quality of food preparation as well as realistic liquor policies (no more than one drink at a time in front of any one single customer).

This drink policy bespoke a sense of responsibility in this establishment hard by the Maze interchange that many restaurant/bars would do well to emulate and we applaud the sensible approach to liquor held here.

We chose the Vietnamese spring rolls as appetizer while plowing through a couple of well-iced mojitos and found the rolls to be light, tasty and well complemented by two zesty dipping sauces. One of our company, disbelieving possibility in a freeway-based eatery, chose the Philly cheesesteak with Caesar salad and the other opted for a full blackened catfish dinner with braised veggies. The catfish turned up surprisingly delicate, flaky and perfectly done with a homemade remoulade cup that had a nice little zing in the nostrils unlike the more common mayo and relish blend found in lesser venues. We had lucked out and the man who chose the Philly sandwich had made a relatively poor choice, although that sandwich did appear well appointed with peppers, not too many onions and a merciful lack of grease.

The veggies were perfectly done, with a nice blend of zucchini, broccoli, and other greens, all well warmed and crunchy and delicately seasoned.

We gandered at several salads floating by, heaped with all sorts of well-prepared and well-thought toppings, all of which looked very flavorful indeed and realized that the local proprietor had devised a sort of diamond in the rough in this location.

Our waitress was helpful with things unfamiliar and spot on in her suggestions as well as remarkably quick to respond at all times.

We give this restaurant four stars and hearty well-wishes of good success.