

Dining Out

Willem's brings Klitsie across the river

Vancouver's Main Street gets a taste of the magic of Portland's Pearl District

By Karen Livingston for The Columbian

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Grilled pork loin and soft polenta salsa verde at Willem's on Main. (Photo by [Steven Lane](#))

Why: Chef/Owner Willem Paul Klitsie of Fratelli in Portland's Pearl District has brought his magic to downtown Vancouver with the opening of [Willem's on Main](#).

The present menu at Willem's features upscale American fare with Italian and French influence. This, according to Klitsie, is subject to seasonal change. Using locally sourced ingredients from

artisans and wineries across Washington as much as possible is a priority for Klitsie. Millennium Farms in Ridgefield is among his purveyors.

Atmosphere: Warm colors and romantic lighting create a foundation for the decor. Reclaimed theater seating from the Kiggins Theatre (just a few doors north of the restaurant), paired with equally nostalgic tables topped with tree trunk cross sections, provide interesting arrangements in the front of the restaurant. Seating capacity is kept to a cozy 30 on the main floor. A loft in the back of the restaurant offers a long table for a larger party and feels quite exclusive. One of my favorite features is found above the entry where the balcony displays a septet of lamps, artfully picturesque in front of the streetside window's transom. Absolutely charming truly sums up the atmosphere of Willem's on Main.

What I tried: I sampled the bruschetta with mascarpone, roasted beef, truffle cheese and truffle oil and the shrimp and garlic served with a few thin slices of fresh French bread. I also sampled the grilled Romaine topped with toasted almonds, grated cheese and a light balsamic and oil dressing, the Fennel coleslaw with marinated skirt steak, and the grilled pork loin served with a medley of cannellini beans, apple, Nuesky bacon, and halved Brussels sprouts in pan jus. In addition to these, I tried the side of Soft Polenta with Salsa Verde, and for dessert, the Toasted Angel Food Cake with Pear Rum Confit.

Every selection that I tried was delicious in its own right. The grilled pork loin entrée stands out for its complexity and comfort food quality. The pork was juicy and savory, and the accompanying bean mixture was sweet and smoky with a hint of bitter from the innermost layer of the Brussels sprouts. It was a treat for the senses and gone too fast.

The shrimp and garlic (from the happy hour menu) was mouth-watering and could only be improved by the inclusion of one more shrimp. As it is, it contains three — challenging one's sense of equality when it comes to sharing with a dining companion.

The bruschetta combines rich flavors in a satisfyingly tasteful creation, as does the soft polenta with salsa verde. When I ordered the polenta side, given its name, I was thinking "Southwest." The salsa was green, but it was not of Southwest character. It was instead a parsley, caper, and oil mixture that lent a refreshing quality to the rich, smooth polenta.

I enjoyed the fennel coleslaw that was made using the bulb of the plant. The slaw had a light refreshing flavor and paired well with the marinated skirt steak, which possessed a velvety texture. This dish is served with a glass of cream soda — perfect!

The minimalism of the grilled romaine (from the happy hour menu) made it a nice interim dish amid the more multifaceted selections.

Toasted angel food cake ... imagine that! A must try. Toasting the cake changes the texture from super spongy to springy and imparts a crystallized value to the flavor. The pear rum confit was a delectable complement for the cake, making the dessert a wonderful finish to the meal.

Menu highlights beyond what I tried: The Beer-Braised Roasted Short Ribs and Fettucini sounded delicious, as did the Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Nuesky Bacon in Buttermilk Sauce.

Other observations: Service is spot-on upscale without pretension, food is excellent and pocket-friendly, atmosphere is absolutely charming.

I believe most, if not all, who visit Willem's on Main will be delighted Klitsie has brought his experience and expertise to this side of the Columbia River.

The scale of the restaurant and the scope of the menu are well-matched, bringing something to Clark County's dining scene that has been lacking since the closing of Oliver's in Camas.

Cost: Most lunch items are \$7, other than the Willem's Burger made with mortadella, smoked tomato, and sautéed potatoes, which is \$11. Dinner items range from \$4 for sides, such as Sautéed Spinach with Garlic and the Sautéed Potatoes with Onions, up to \$19 for Potato Gnocchi with Duck Confit and Grape Sauce.

Hours: Lunch is served 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Dinner is served 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday, Monday and Thursday and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Happy Hour is 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Telephone: 360-258-0989.

Where: 907 Main St., Vancouver.

Health score: Willem's on Main has received a pre-opening inspection and is scheduled for a routine inspection in the near future. Zero is a perfect score, and Clark County Public Health closes restaurants with a score of 100 or higher. For information, call 360-397-8428.