

## Spencer's brings tears of joy

By Kevin Finch • Correspondent • DECEMBER 2, 2005

During a particularly good meal I have been known to chuckle between bites, but I discovered two weeks ago that at a truly incredible dinner I might even cry. Some emotion is to be expected since I do love food, but I never expected to actually tear up, and especially not in such a testosterone setting as a steak house.



(Brian Plonka The Spokesman-Review )

Yet at Spencer's and in the presence of my wife and two close friends I did just this over Warmed Chocolate and Fudge "Naughty" Cake and Old Fashioned Strawberry Shortcake (both \$6.25). Just one bite of each after a wonderful meal with sensational service pushed me over the edge.

Take my advice: request a small home-equity loan, turn off your cell phone and find a night soon to slide into one of Spencer's deep intimate booths with its starched white table cloth. I guarantee that table cloth will become a visual history of your meal – ours boasted a stained red crescent from the smooth Australian Shiraz Cabernet along with balsamic-beef broth smudges from Spencer's stunning Broiled Beefsteak Tomatoes (\$6.95).

The tomatoes arrived warm but still firm under a shroud of melted mozzarella and Parmesan cheese with thin ribbons of fresh basil. On my second visit I broke a sacrosanct rule of restaurant criticism when I insisted we order them again. In fact, I have no interest in ordering any other starter at Spencer's after tasting the tomatoes. We did try the Crab Cakes (\$10.95) once, but I found them mushy and uninspired.

**Review**

**Spencer's For Steaks and Chops**

*When:* Mondays-Thursdays, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; Fridays, 11 a.m.-11 p.m.; Saturdays, 3-11 p.m.; Sundays, 3-9 p.m.

*Where:* DoubleTree Hotel Spokane City Center, 322 N. Spokane Falls Court.

*Cost:* Lunch entrées, \$7.95-16.95. Dinner entrées, \$18.95-\$34.95 (some specials are more).

*Call:* (509) 744-2372. Reservations are recommended.

*By the way:* Smoking allowed in the bar until the state law changes Thursday. Complimentary valet parking with a meal or validated self-parking under the new convention center wing.

But back to our table cloth ... which in front of my wife showed the juice stains from the best tasting Double Cut Lamb Chops (\$25.95) any at our table that night could remember. They arrived unadorned with a simple ramekin of mint jelly.

Just as astonishing was the Broiled Chicken Chop with Garlic Smash (\$21.95) with tender moist meat under a charred crackle of skin brushed with a whole grain mustard and honey glaze. The chicken is the only main course that comes with a starch on the side; the other meats are simply served with a half round of crusty Peasant bread and a generous house salad (you can substitute a specialty salad for the house for an additional \$3).

At my place the stains were drippings from a Skillet of Burgundy Mushrooms (\$5.95) and a 22-ounce special bone-in Del Monaco cut ribeye (\$39.95) that just might be the most flavorful piece of meat I've eaten in my 38 years with teeth. Like every steak served by Chef Jonathan Holden's kitchen, my ribeye was Prime beef – coming from the very top of the elaborate USDA six-tier grading system for beef that was established in this country in 1927.

Only 1 to 3 percent of beef receives this coveted classification, and there is no doubt you pay dearly for it. Yet Ecclesiastes says there is a time under heaven for everything, and I can hardly wait for it to be time again to try another cut of aged, Midwest corn-fed, Prime seared in Spencer's unique 1,800-degree infrared Vulcan broiler.

Spencer's steaks come simply salted and peppered, but for an extra \$5 you can request yours come Oscar (topped with crab meat, asparagus and a béarnaise sauce), Peppered (rolled in cracked black peppercorns and brown sugar and topped with a peppercorn sauce) or Bleu (smothered in a tangy slurry of Danish blue cheese, shallots, walnuts and a hint of vinegar).

The full dinner menu also is available along with sandwiches at lunch, but for my money dinner is where Spencer's shines not just with steaks. For a steak and chop establishment,

Spencer's serves a surprising amount of fresh seafood as well, using its mantra of high quality ingredients prepared simply.

The hefty price of our meal came with prime service as well as exceptional meat. I can't speak for all of Spencer's staff in their crisp white jackets and black ties, but if Paul Lakin is representative of the staff, diners are in for a treat. Without fawning over us, Lakin walked us through the evening with humor, ease and answers to any questions we posed. When I ordered the full Heart of Iceberg with Crumbled Bleu Salad (\$6.95) with my 22-ounce ribeye, he tried gently to suggest a half order might do. When I later apologized for ignoring his advice, he just grinned and said, "I didn't want to get in the way if you really wanted to swing for the fence."

If you add to the stains on our table a smear of the dark smooth Belgian chocolate from the flourless cake and a fleck of fresh strawberries and whipped cream, that cloth tells a story that fits Lakin's baseball allusion. The night we visited, Spencer's swung for the fence and connected; the meal was enough to bring a grown man to tears.