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### D I N I N G O U T

## A Rebirth, and a Retention of Class

By JOANNE STARKEY

**M**ILLIONS have been poured into a renovation of the Garden City Hotel, and it shows. It's especially evident in the Polo Restaurant (formerly the Polo Grill).

The Polo Grill became the hotel's premier restaurant in 1990, when its lobby location was muted and transformed by potted trees, high-backed banquettes, wood paneling and etched glass into a more copy spot. Yet it was still a lobby restaurant.

No longer. The present room is far removed from the hubbub and is smaller and more intimate. Diners are seated in tall brocade-backed chairs, surrounded by wood paneling, massive arched mirrors and ivory fabric-covered walls dotted with interesting paintings, some illustrating the polo theme. Tables are adorned with bouquets of lilies and orchids and flickering votive candles. An enormous chandelier, dropped from a gilt ceiling, is at the room's center.

At the outset, patrons are treated to a free nibble, different every night. In my three visits, the best was a puff pastry-prosciutto pinwheel. A bit later another amuse arrives, possibly halibut carpaccio or a mushroom topped seared scallop in a balsamic glaze. The staff offers three varieties of housemade breads (black olive, white or nut) and recites the pedigrees of the butter (sweet or salted from France), salt (*fleur de sel*) and pepper.

The solicitous waiters were well informed about ingredients in dishes and selections on the wine list. One evening, though when I was obviously recognized, service was almost smothering, with bread plates exchanged three times even though I had eaten only one slice of bread. That same night, a representative of the hotel placed himself at a nearby table and watched every morsel we ate. Despite this lack of subtlety and sophistication, I give the service high marks because it appeared to be smooth and seamless for other dinners, not the cloying treatment I received.

It's harder to know how representative the food was, but even with the elegant surroundings and snappy service, it



Phil Marino for The New York Times

#### The Polo Restaurant

Garden City Hotel, 45 Seventh Street, Garden City, (516) 747-3000.

#### Excellent

**ATMOSPHERE** Opulent, sophisticated hotel dining room.

**SERVICE** Attentive, amiable and very well informed; heavy-handed if you are suspected of being a restaurant critic.

**SOUND LEVEL** Civilized.

**RECOMMENDED DISHES** Seasonal salad, scallops, tiger shrimp, foie gras, smoked salmon-grapefruit salad, sweet potato soup, halibut, lobster, wild mushroom-red wine stew, veal noisettes, filet mignon, chicken all desserts, cheese plate.

**WINE LIST** More than 200 full bottles and 24 half bottles, ranging from under \$20 into the thousands.

**PRICE RANGE** Lunch, entrees \$14 to \$26. At dinner, appetizers \$8.50 to \$19; entrees \$24 to \$35; desserts \$8.50 to \$16.

**CREDIT CARDS** All the majors.

**HOURS** Lunch, noon to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday; Sunday brunch, noon to 4 p.m. Dinner, 6 to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, till 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. No dinner on Sunday.

**RESERVATIONS** A must.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY** Fully accessible.

**THE RATINGS** Extraordinary, Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory, Fair, Poor.

Ratings reflect the reviewer's reaction to food, ambiance and service, with price taken into consideration. Menu listings and prices are subject to change.

took center stage. We were delighted with nearly every dish produced by the kitchen of Steven DeBruyn, the restaurant's classically trained executive chef, who has held the position since 1997. Seafood lovers praised the trio of sauteed scallops over a creamy celery root risotto, the medallions of hot smoked salmon mated with a grapefruit salad with paper-thin slices of radish, and the giant heads-on tiger shrimp in a

gingered broth. A seasonal salad with roasted apples, candied pecans and sundried cranberries in a Dijon-walnut vinaigrette was another crowd pleaser, as was a sweet potato soup garnished with gala apples, cinnamon smoked quail and creme fraiche. The appetizer superstar, though, was foie gras three ways: sauteed and placed as a topper on a tiny bowl of onion soup, flavoring on oval-shaped flan and wrapped around a

dried fig with a raspberry vinaigrette reduction.

There were no disappointments at main-course time. The best fish sampled was a very tasty garlic-studded halibut above a broth with tender littleneck clams, diced chorizo and cremini mushrooms. Slowly poached lobster, removed from the shell and paired with crisply sauteed sweetbreads, was another show-stopper. Meat eaters had good picks in the mustard-glazed filet mignon, the noisettes of veal topped with chanterelle mushrooms and the potato-crust chicken, which was running with juices. A vegetarian selection more than held its own. It starred a wild mushroom and red wine stew in a crunch croustade with a scattering of honey-glazed baby root vegetables.

The twin headliners at dessert time were the glorious cheeseboard, lovingly described in mouth-watering detail, and *La Grande Finale*, a tasting of six chocolate desserts. The latter extravaganza was served in two courses and included delicious lovelies like a triple chocolate sorbet. A free plate of cookies, tiny pastries and chocolates provided a sweet send-off from this elegant, special-occasion dining room. ■