



# H A M P T O N ' S

at *JH Adams Inn*

## Elegant setting has food to match

By John Batchelor, Go Triad Restaurant Reviewer

**Overall rating** ★★★★★

**Sanitation grade:** A (93.5)

**Food** ★★★★★

Original, creative preparations, generally well-executed.

**Ambience** ★★★★★

Among the most elegant in the Triad.

**Service** ★★★★★

Enthusiastic and well-paced on the floor, sometimes absent at the door.

**Value** ★★★★★

Competitive pricing vs. other fine-dining restaurants on the menu, salad included in entrée price, half-price wines by the glass on Thursday nights.

**Credit cards:** Visa, MC, AmEx, Discover

**ABC permits:** All

**Appetizers:** \$9-\$12

**Salads:** \$7

**Soups:** \$5/cup-\$7/bowl

**Entrees:** \$20-\$30

**Desserts:** \$7

**Handicapped accessibility:** Seating on entry level from parking lot; wheelchair lift to seating from front entrance

**Kid friendly:** Separate children's menu not available, but accommodations will be made.

Hampton's is the new restaurant in the elegant J.H. Adams Inn. This setting, an Italian Renaissance home on the National Register, ranks among the most elegant in the Triad. You descend a spiral staircase into the dining area, where white arches accent peach walls. Servers wear black with the Hampton's logo on their shirts. Black napkins are a welcome change from linty white.

Inconsistencies emerged from bread service. Parmesan-onion foccacia tasted very good. Breadsticks, warm but doughy and tough on two occasions, provided good Parmesan flavor and a modest crust after I requested that they actually be baked. Another minute or so routinely in an oven, and they, too, would earn praise.

Other food items showed generally higher attention to detail. Butternut Squash and Lump Crab Bisque (\$5/cup-\$7/bowl) exuded flavors of squash and cream, laced with crème fraîche. A pleasant, smoky beef aroma wafted from French Onion With Bleu Cheese and Parmesan Soup (\$5/cup-\$7/bowl), undergirded by soft-cooked onions and melted cheeses on top. Both soups arrived at the table steaming hot.

Calamari French Fries (\$10) are special. Squid is cut into strips, like french-fried potatoes, creating a unique appearance and texture, its flavor accented by an apricot chili dipping sauce. Jumbos, bearing an unusually tender texture and depth of natural shrimp flavor, were featured in Fried Shrimp and Grit Ravioli (\$9). The grit ravioli had been ladled with a wonderful sauce constructed from country ham, scallions and cream. Six large Baked Oysters (\$10) were served on the half shell, with capicola ham and pine nuts incorporated into a spinach topping, covered with melted Parmesan cheese.

Although Roasted Quail (\$12) with cornbread cranberry stuffing and whole-grain mustard maple glaze is listed on the menu as a starter, I used my serving as an entrée. The portion size is certainly adequate for that purpose, and the flavors are richly rewarding. Collard greens with smoked bacon made this a complete meal.

In a Grilled Caesar Salad (\$7), the romaine lettuce spent just enough time over the fire to wilt the edges and impart a smoky undertone, reinforced by oven-roasted tomatoes and a mild blue cheese dressing. Entrée prices include a house salad of mesclun greens, carrots and Roma tomatoes. I was especially enamored with the creamy balsamic vinaigrette.

Grilled Ashley Farms Chicken (\$20) displayed exceptional flavor from the free-range chicken itself, enhanced by a roasted garlic sage cream sauce. Sweet

potato ravioli came from Drake's, a High Point pasta producer that serves major restaurants nationwide. Seared Jumbo Scallops and Shrimp (\$22) were placed over Drake's red pepper linguini, supplemented by olives, spinach and feta cheese in a chardonnay broth.

A mild dusting of pepper enhanced the light crust of Pan Seared Red Snapper (\$24) with citrus herb butter and apple wood bacon, Swiss chard and a white bean ragout. Golden raisins and sliced Granny Smith apples decorated Smoked Pork Tenderloin (\$23). A vegetable bouquet of broccolini and sliced carrots wrapped in strips of zucchini, plus roasted red peppers, turnips, roasted garlic and mashed potatoes, made up one of the most elegant presentations I have seen in our area.

In Lump Crab Stuffed Flounder (\$24), the slightly crusty fish surrounded a center of crab dressing. A Mandarin sesame hollandaise sauce (laced with sesame oil and studded with Mandarin oranges) extended flavor. This was the only entrée that produced mixed impressions around the table. Some considered the flounder too soft, but others thought that in this preparation, any texture at all is unusual and worthy of compliment.

A deep, rich flavor, rendered more complex by a cabernet fig demiglace, emerged from Braised Venison Osso Buco (\$28), as dark meat literally fell off the bone from a fork's touch. Mashed potatoes were laced with spinach. A large Grilled Filet of Beef Tenderloin (\$30) provided solid depth of flavor and tender texture, complemented by a roasted wild mushroom bordelaise. The kitchen nailed the requested cooking temperature on the first try.

In addition to the salad, a medley of broccolini, carrots, red peppers, cubed turnips, home-fried potatoes, and fresh herbs made strikingly colorful presentations.

We shared one dessert around the table. The kitchen stacked two slices of Chocolate Cheese Cake (\$7) over two mousses - one cinnamon, the other strawberry. Worth the calories. Half-price wines and live jazz on Thursday night (6 to 9 p.m.) represent a special lure.

Steve Smid, self-taught, is executive chef. He is the former executive sous chef at M. Stephen's (R.I.P.). Before this review is published, I will already have returned to Hampton's just for enjoyment. I am not often that enamored with a new restaurant, and that return visit (and others to follow) convey my appraisal.