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Poppy's patio
photos by Chris Johnson

Poppy's Garden Café & Restaurant

107 S. Church St., McKinney
Tuesday- Thursday 11am-9pm
Friday-Saturday 11am-11pm
closed Sunday & Monday
Major Credit Cards Accepted



Food



Service



Atmosphere



Value

(scale of five forks)

McKinney's Best Backyard Surprise

By Jarrett Steele

WHILE OTHER PEOPLE around the country are shoveling the white stuff about now, we Texans are doing what comes most natural: dining al fresco. Thanks to mild temperatures and the genius of propane space heaters, no patio shall be underutilized, even (fortunately) in nearby McKinney.

We headed east on a recent unseasonably warm winter night to a converted home in the middle of one of the older neighborhoods, a mere stone's throw from the town square. Coming in from the back, the red and yellow illuminated sign lit the way to Poppy's, where we passed through an open fence gate into an expansive courtyard, illuminated by strings of white lights swaying in the light breeze between tall trees. We made our way up a weaving flagstone path in the house's backyard, up the steps to a tri-level redwood patio deck.

We were quickly greeted and offered a table inside a main dining room of red walls, white painted window frames, plank floors and black tablecloths, but the allure of the deck and the cloudless

night sky made us turn right back around for the back door.

We led off with Parmesan-artichoke dip (\$9) that was outstanding, with copious bite-sized pieces of artichoke, red pepper and onion in a buttery sauce, beneath a nicely baked layer of Parmesan crust. The finely minced olive tapenade spread on the side was also worthwhile for layering on the freshly baked pita wedges that accompanied it. Aside from the dip, we put the Thai-style beef jerky with cilantro-chili sauce and the crispy duck pizza with fontina cheese and cherry-hoisin glaze on the list to definitely try on our next visit.

We also enjoyed splitting the baby spinach salad (\$8) with tiny mandarin oranges and fresh avocado pieces, coated in a very light orange and poppy seed dressing. I can't say I have ever been able to get excited about salad, but I was a little envious of the patrons at the table next to us who opted for the ginger-carrot house dressing.

After an interlude to further taste the Chilean Santa Rita Reserve Cabernet (\$7 by the glass), my dining companion

got to "unwrap" her dinner. Enclosed in a banana leaf envelope, she found a meaty white halibut filet (\$24) served with a neon green, cilantro-lime sauce for dipping. The sauce definitely enhanced the firm, squarish fish, but it was the accompanying warm olive soba noodles that really knocked her out.

My bread pudding was a massive hunk of white chocolate cake & apricot bites, drizzled with raspberry & vanilla bourbon sauces.

On the other side of the table, my stir fry platter (\$15) arrived as a somewhat spicy medley of shaved sirloin, shitake mushrooms, carrot medallions and bell pepper, swimming in a dark basil and garlic brown sauce. I ignored the plain, uninteresting steamed white rice on the



side and dug in as the crisp vegetables, basil leaves and minced garlic was great with the beef. Other menu entrées further conveyed Poppy's mostly Asian flair, including a pepper-crusted ahi tuna, orange ginger glazed salmon and Thai-braised short ribs.

Two desserts (\$6) also impressed: the flourless chocolate smore tart, a neat column with graham cracker crumbs was deemed by the dining companion as "pure cocoa satisfaction;" my bread pudding was a massive hunk of white chocolate cake and apricot bites, drizzled liberally with raspberry and bourbon vanilla sauces.

Sitting outside at the gray metal table in silver patio chairs had been remarkably laid back and relaxing until dessert, when a lady (employed there) suddenly began belting out a cappella R&B songs, scaring the hell out of the tables in the immediate vicinity. This was a complete turnaround from our server and the rest of the waitstaff, who were friendly and very accommodating throughout.

Pardoning the interruption, Poppy's offers eclectic cuisine in a casual setting that will make you want to head for the patio, no matter what time of year.

Jarrett Steele is a writer living on the verge of Frisco. When his fork isn't busy sampling new and interesting restaurants in town, you'll find him kicking back and grilling out.




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