



IMAGINE, INVENT, INDULGE *Chef creates art for the palate*

BY E.C. GLADSTONE

How often do you get to indulge yourself, then feel good about it afterward? That's the rare feeling you take away from a meal at RM Seafood, one of the most ecologically conscious gourmet restaurants not just in Las Vegas, but perhaps anywhere. Chef/owner Rick Moonen came to Vegas three years ago as a veteran star of the New York City culinary scene (you may have seen him on *Top Chef Masters*, and Oprah's an undying fan), yet he's equally proud of his active membership in the Seafood Choices Alliance, Ecofish, SeaWeb and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

But don't expect an educational experience, unless you ask for it. Instead, at RM, you're going to get unpretentiously elegant,

internationally inspired food that just happens to be made with sustainable—and almost always organic—fish, produce and meats. The estimable list of wines and sakes also passed rigorous tests.

Start with a bowl of the signature clam chowder, the ultimate expression of that simple soup, filled with freshly shucked clams, bacon, onions and other vegetables, each flavor distinct yet complementary. Or, if you don't join the throngs ordering the two-tier raw bars, other remarkable starters include a single white Georgia shrimp, crusted with aromatic toasted garlic and spices, vanilla-orange confit, basil essence and cucumber "noodles"; the Deadliest Catch "salad," an arty presentation of



Lobster roll



Deadliest Catch salad

RM SEAFOOD

MANDALAY PLACE

LUNCH 11 A.M.-4 P.M.; DINNER 5-11 P.M.

DAILY. 702.632.9300

buttery Alaskan king crab, varieties of heirloom beets and compressed watermelons, and a cucumber blossom over a tomato and squid ink sauce that plays on your palate like swirling watercolors; and wild sockeye salmon gravlax rolled with corn, dill crème fraîche and American osetra caviar.

Grilled swordfish, more mild and tender than typical, comes atop curried chickpeas and under an olive-laden Niçoise crust, with preserved lemon to perk the palate. Steak frites offers juicy slices of velvety skirt steak with béarnaise sauce, aged 20 days and portioned to be part of a meal rather than the whole deal. The seasoned potato wedges definitely left us wanting more.

A great punctuation mark to the meal comes in the form of a sake bomb (beer boilermaker with sake) accompanying a lightly fried piece of uni and foie gras rolled sushi-style, a gorgeous bloom of sugar, yeast and

lipid. But if sweetness is required, you'll guffaw over Rick's Tasting Game, a chessboard of 16 mystery gelato flavors (laugh hard enough and the irrepressible chef himself may pull up a chair to tease you further). A duo of blueberry compote and crumble with vanilla yogurt sorbet or the chocolate risotto pleases as much without the tease.

Exciting visually and orally, RM's presentations range from museum quality to homespun simplicity. With Gerald Chin now joining Adam Sobel on Moonen's culinary team, the rising star chefs promise an even more exciting experience in the sleek upstairs space, reopening for fine dining later this year. If it's even more indulgent, does that mean we'll feel even better about enjoying it? **LVM**