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September 2nd, 2009

## A healthy school lunch



*Salad bar at St. Patrick School*

The students at [St. Patrick School](#) in Miami Beach kicked off the school year with a new, [healthier lunch program](#). Gone are the fried, processed foods. In are healthier meals prepared from scratch using grass-fed meats, hormone and antibiotic free milk and eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables, and local products where possible. Last Friday, I stopped by the school to eat lunch with the students.

The new program is run by Green Rocks Foods, a company formed by Mercy Capote and chef Adri Garcia. Because Mercy has children who attend the school, she knew first hand what they were being served — think tater tots and hot dogs — and she wanted to change it. They approached the school about it and now they're heading the kitchen.



### *Lunch at St. Patrick*

I lined up with the kids and picked up my lunch of sloppy joes (made with grass-fed meat), peas and carrots, broccoli and cheese soup, half a plum and bottled water. I also stopped by the salad bar and made myself a salad of greens, chickpeas and carrots with a balsamic vinaigrette made in-house. I must say for a school lunch, the food was good and so much better than [what I've seen gets served at some U.S. schools](#). The girls at my table seemed to like their new lunches too. Better than before, they said.

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August 27th, 2009

### **Recovering ...**

I spent all of last week – from weekend to weekend – sick at home and mostly in bed with what doctors now think was a severe allergic reaction to ... something. It wasn't fun and I even got to experience my first ever hospital meal, something I hope I won't have to be subjected to for a second time anytime soon. The peas and carrots were the mushiest I have ever eaten. And the mashed potatoes, gosh, so bland! Fortunately, I'm slowly getting back to normal and catching up on things so I'll have a few posts for you soon. Until then.

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August 9th, 2009

## First impressions: Hakkasan



For my first [Miami Spice](#) dinner I chose to go to [Hakkasan](#), the Fontainebleau locale of [Alan Yau's](#) London restaurant by the same name. Though its [Miami Spice menu](#) wasn't the most appealing among [my choices](#), I wanted to check it out. Arriving at the restaurant from the hotel lobby takes some walking past shops and other restaurants, then getting into an elevator that drops you off right at the restaurant's entrance on the fourth floor.

The place is a work of design. It has a gorgeous interior with latticed dark wood panels, dark wood furniture contrasts and light bluish green leather seats embroidered with gold thread and accented with silk pillows. Light projectors create the effect of moving water reflections against the stone wall behind the bar. A large blue glass wall at one end of the main dining room pops against its dark surroundings.

While my intention was to order from the Miami Spice menu, which they don't offer you unless you ask for it, my dining companions – D and [Mr. Blind Mind](#) – were more interested in the regular menu than by the Spice menu options. I don't blame them. Hakkasan's menu is expansive with a long list of appetizers, and anywhere between 7 and 10 dishes in each of the menu's main categories: fish, seafood, poultry, meat, vegetarian and noodles. Three tofu dishes are also offered.

We started with the dim sum platter (\$24), wild mushroom lettuce wraps (\$18) and roasted mango duck (\$18). Of the group, the duck was the standout dish for me. I loved how the its tender meat and crispy skin paired with the sweetness of the perfectly ripe mango slices. The dim sum was also a good choice. It included a shrimp dumpling, a vegetable and wild mushroom dumpling, a chive dumpling with shrimp and a scallop dumpling – my favorite. The lettuce for the wraps was Lilliputian and while the wild mushrooms had good flavor, the dish was the least impressive. Plus, its price seemed disproportionate considering that the roasted duck was priced the same.

While our server explained – well into our meal – that the entrees are meant to be family style, we each ordered individually. I ordered a spicy Assam prawn in coconut (\$36), D the braised black bean grouper claypot (\$35) and our friend stir-fried scallop and pumpkin in black bean (\$36). We also ordered a side of bok choy in oyster sauce instead of ordering rice (yes, you must order it separately).

There were no major disappointments in the food we ordered. My shrimp was served inside a baby coconut that kept the dish steaming throughout the whole meal. Sweet buns were served on the side to dip into the spicy sauce. I liked my dish but found my companions' dishes, of which I got a small taste, much more interesting.

The service at Hakkasan was spotty. Our server wasn't very knowledgeable about the food and failed to inform us about several things like the fact that there is a \$3 surcharge for spirits ordered on the rocks, which we noticed only when it came time to pay. I also perceived some attitude on part of the restaurant with regards to Miami Spice. We witnessed a party of six leave upset shortly after being seated because they had one more person in their party than Hakkasan allows to take advantage of the promotion. There's also a minimum.

In the end, I was glad that I didn't order the Miami Spice menu here. While our decision resulted in a more expensive meal, I think I had a better dining experience and better food based on [what others are saying about the Spice menu](#). There are a number of entrees in the \$18 to \$30 range that can help you keep your dinner at Hakkasan within a decent price range. Just make sure you skip the bottled water and keep the cocktails to a minimum. Parking is free with validation through September 30.

### [Hakkasan](#)

4441 Collins Ave., Miami Beach  
786.276.1388



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August 3rd, 2009

## [Let's hear it for the mamey](#)

The first time I tasted mamey was at the graduate school offices of the University of Miami. My boss Norma would bring in blended mamey pulp, pour it into those office Styrofoam coffee cups and put it in the freezer so my fellow student workers and I could enjoy the frozen treat in the afternoon.



*Photos by [Rachael Lee Coleman](#)*

If you grew up in South Florida or have lived here long enough, chances are you've seen or tasted a mamey. The brown-skinned, oval-shaped fruit has a bright orange-reddish interior when ripe. Its taste is often described as a mix of vanilla and sweet potato; its texture is somewhat like custard. In Miami, you're most likely to see it used in *batidos* (shakes) at Cuban establishments like El Palacio de los Jugos and Versailles. Yet the fruit is not very well known elsewhere in the United States and even among some South Floridians.

That could be changing soon.

[Slow Food Miami](#) has nominated the fruit, more specifically the Pantin variety, to the [U.S. Ark of Taste](#), a catalog of over 200 foods that are in danger of disappearing from our tables. By promoting demand of the foods in the catalog, the group seeks to preserve them.

I spoke to Noel Ramos, Slow Food Miami advisory board member and the person preparing the nomination, who says he considers the mamey a heritage fruit because it is rare and only grown in South Florida. “It’s not like mangoes that are grown all over Central and South America. The Pantin is only grown here. The 300-400 acres we have here is all we have.”

[Read the rest of this entry »](#)

Filed in [Eating local](#) — [8 Comments](#) so far  
July 28th, 2009

## [It's Miami Spice time again \[Updated\]](#)



It's that time of year again. [Miami Spice 2009](#) kicks off this **Saturday, August 1** with about 100 restaurants offering three-course lunch and/or dinner menus for **\$22** and **\$35** plus tax and gratuity.

Once upon a time, I looked forward to this time of year, especially in earlier days when Miami Spice was a chance for me to try restaurants I couldn't afford at the time, and when it seemed as if many of the restaurants put a little more effort into showcasing their food on the Spice menus. I still fondly remember a [Miami Spice dinner I had at The Grill at the Setai](#) as a wonderful dining experience. But now, with the seemingly growing popularity of prix fixe menu events at Miami restaurants, Miami Spice doesn't seem as special as it once was. Still, I'm always up for making at least one Miami Spice excursion.

Here's my short list so far (note that not all menus have been posted to the website):

**Because I'm not one to dine at steakhouses and this is the perfect excuse to try a new one ...**  
[BLT Steak](#)

### **Appetizers**

- House-Made Ricotta Gnudi, Aged Parmegiano Reggiano, Lemon-Creme Fraiche
- Crispy Pork-Watermelon Salad, Marinated Tomatoes, Scallions, Soy-Lime Vinaigrette

### **Entrees**

- Citrus Marinated Flap Steak 8oz., Smoked Cipollini, Fleur de Sel
- Pan Roasted Local Black Grouper, Charred Summer Apricots, Sage-Brown Butter

### **Desserts**

- New York-Ricotta Cheesecake, Watermelon-Basil Chilled Soup
- Coffee Pot de Creme, Pistachio Ice Cream, Candied Orange

**Because I don't seem to make my way there often enough — and the menu looks great ...**  
[Michy's](#)

### Starters

- Watermelon greek, french feta, tomatoes, cucumbers, Zahtar, red wine vinaigrette
  - Creamy polenta and truffle poached egg, crispy bacon
  - Pork belly, nectarines , basil, star anise
- Chilled beet soup, caraway, dill, crème fraiche, pickled onions

### Mains

- Grilled short rib of beef, green tomato slaw, gremolata
- Seared salmon, roast and raw beets, farro, oranges, saffron nage
- Fettucine carbonara “my way,” English peas, pancetta, speck, melting St. Andre, crispy jamon serrano
- Yellowtail braised in malaysian curry, mango, sticky rice, heart of palm stew

### Desserts

- Upside down nectarine cake, fresh lavender cream
  - Michy’s bread pudding
- Summer fruit salad, daily granita, mint and basil

Because I want to see what all the fuss is about ... [Scarpetta](#)

### Primi Piatti

- Raw Yellowtail - olio di zenzero, marinated onions & baby greens
  - Creamy Polenta - fricasse of truffled mushrooms
- Braised Short Ribs of Beef - vegetable & farro risotto

### Piatti

- Spaghetti tomato & basil
- Black Cod, concentrated tomatoes & roasted fennel
- Roasted baby chicken, creamy orzo, parsnip puree, fegato sauce & almonds

### Dolce

- Amedei chocolate cake, toasted almond gelato & salted caramel sauce
  - Coconut panna cotta, caramelized pineapple & guava “soup”

*\*Note: Valet parking at Scarpetta is complimentary during Miami Spice with validation at the restaurant.*

Others I may like to try but don’t have menus posted yet include [Petit Rouge](#), [Au Pied de Cochon](#), and [Hakkasan](#). I was interested in [Eos](#) but they’re only doing lunch and the menu doesn’t look too interesting.

So, how about you? Are you doing Miami Spice this year?

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Update: The [Petit Rouge](#) and [Hakkasan](#) menus are up. My first Miami Spice stop will be Hakkasan. Stay tuned for the report.

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