

## Des Moines Register

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**Section:** Datebook

**Page:** 12DB

**Column:** Moranville W.E.

### Monday is a prime night at Christopher's

*Moranville W.E.*

*Special to Des Moines Register*

#### DATEBOOK DINER

W. E. Moranville

I recently returned to Des Moines from Chicago, where I ate food so good I wanted to cry. What made the return particularly difficult was that it was a Monday night (kind of a dead night for dining in this town). My deadline for the review loomed large in the immediate future, and I knew I'd be hard-pressed to find anything that quite compared to the Poached Egg over Arugula with Taleggio Cream at the refined but casual Lula Caf .

So what is a Des Moines restaurant reviewer to do? Be a grump about what we don't have or a cheerleader for what we do?

Well, this reviewer is a little of both. You've got to love our time-honored traditions (great steaks and prime rib), but to get from a complacent here to an exciting there, diners and restaurateurs alike need to be more adventuresome. That's why I appreciate the classic and contemporary sides of Christopher's, that age-old Beaverdale Italian-American haunt. Lula it ain't, but it's not your pop's steakhouse, either.

**AMBIENCE:** Well, in this way it is your pop's steakhouse, but that's OK -the subdued rooms exude the reassuring comforts of the midrange, white-tablecloth dining room. Watch out though: There are a few bum tables, notably those by the bar and bus station.

**MENU:** With plenty of pasta and steaks, most Italian and steakhouse classics are here, but so are a few surprises, like a Roasted Pear and Caramelized Walnut Salad, Ginger Salmon and Orange Roughy Romesco (with almond and red pepper sauce).

**TASTES:** I especially appreciated the Olive Chicken, a sprightly dish of sauteed chicken in a brisk lemon and white wine sauce with olives over a bed of shimmering sauteed spinach. It was very good, but not perfect -too many olives dumped on top made it a bit klutzy; still, I just don't think you could have ordered something like this in a Des Moines steakhouse 10 years ago.

Sadly, the womped-up take on a New York Strip (with Gorgonzola and sauteed red onions) brought a dud. The meat was merely fine ('twas no Gino's steak), and came inelegantly buried under the toppings -gooped up Des Moines-style.

The straight-up classics hit their mark. I'm always on the hunt for a good pan-fried (not deep-fried) walleye; the one I found here was everything it should be, with crisp coating and moist, sweet flesh. And I'm happy to say that the prime rib was as good as it ever was. Monday is the night to order it; the thick slab goes for \$14.95, with dessert (in this case, a heady and homemade chocolate mouse-like torte).

**BOTTOM LINE:** Go for prime rib on Mondays, but try something more contemporary, too.

W.E. Moranville can be reached at [datebookdiner@aol.com](mailto:datebookdiner@aol.com).

Christopher's

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WORTH A VISIT TO HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

What the stars mean:

\* -Disappointing

\*\* -Tolerable

\*\*\* -Worth a visit

\*\*\*\* -Highly recommended

\*\*\*\*\* -Exceptional

AT A GLANCE:

Food: Good Italian/steakhouse classics, plus some pleasant surprises.

Service: Reassuringly old-school professionals.

Ambience: Comfortable and subdued, but beware of a few bum tables.

RECOMMENDED DISHES:

Olive Chicken: \$15.50

Pan-Fried Walleye: \$15.50

Prime Rib: \$14.95 Mondays; \$19.95/\$29.95 other nights.

BAR SERVICE:

Full bar.

DETAILS:

2816 Beaver Ave.

Phone: 274-3694

Kitchen hours:

Mondays-Thursdays, 5-10 p.m.

Fridays and Saturdays, 5-11 p.m.

Photo\_By: ANDREA MELENDEZ / THE REGISTER

PRIME RIB AND OLIVE CHICKEN ARE RECOMMENDED AT CHRISTOPHER'S.

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