

The Venetian Room **-- City's Best**

Editor: ★★★★★

Member: ★★★★★

Ambiance and cuisine at the pinnacle of elegance.

From the Editors

When you're out to impress -- or spoil yourself silly -- it's well worth the trek to the outskirts of tourist country in South Orlando to visit one of Central Florida's most renowned restaurants. The Venetian Room's head chef -- Khalid Benghallen, who trained in Europe and North Africa -- got his feet wet in Florida at such respected restaurants as Emeril's and Shula's. The menu he has created here is rich in European inspiration, yet so creatively rendered that it's truly an intercontinental original.

Foie gras with smoked corn polenta is an indulgent starter, and well balanced with a bowl of the tarragon scented Vidalia onion soup. Entree selections feature everything you'd expect at a restaurant of this caliber, from lobster and veal chops to rack of lamb, duck and beef tenderloin. The Maine lobster is finished with a Cognac glaze and accompanied with hazelnut pheasant sausage and saffron risotto. A departure for ordinary poultry dishes, the farm-raised roasted squab comes with a rich mushroom pudding. And the confit of duck features a pastry tartlet filled with guava choucroute and rare slices of duck breast. Dine under the restaurant's copper clad dome in high-class surrounds -- golden chandeliers cast an elegant glow, and if you're celebrating a special occasion (perhaps popping the question, guys?) the secluded banquettes, partially enclosed by etched glass dividers, are tres romantic. -- *Terry Ward*