

Grill and crab house is simply magnificent

By OMNI VORE

Schula's Grill and Crab House is an authentic seafood restaurant. It was like seafood restaurants we loved in San Francisco, Boston, the Bronx and Hawaii. Yet, Schula's is in Rosewood Commons east of Hagerstown, over the mountains from Chesapeake Bay.

On a recent visit to Schula's, my companion, the Professor, and I ordered soup, appetizer and entrées, then reminisced about seafood restaurants we had known and loved.

Our soups arrived first. The Professor ordered New England clam chowder which had carrots and celery and clams and a hint of bacon in its creamy broth. It was served with the proper oyster crackers.

My creamy crab soup was astounding. The generous amounts of lump crab in the soup pleased me.

We did not need an appetizer, but we were enticed by the steamed clams. We asked for them to be simply steamed without the white wine sauce. That was no problem, as the clams were made to order. We received a dozen hard-shelled, top-neck clams of such fine taste, I wished the moment could last. We drank the buttery broth and our only desire was for some bread to sop up this delicious sea potion.

The Professor told me all about the clams he had eaten in his youth in New York City. I was surprised at how much he knew about the different kinds of clams and how

to prepare them.

Our entrées arrived — a shrimp and bacon club sandwich for the Professor and a surf and turf sandwich for me.

First, we ate the fries, for they are best piping hot. These were great fries, meaty and crisp and not too salty. A bottle of malt vinegar had appeared without our asking and we doused our fries.

The Professor ate his shrimp and bacon club with gusto. The white bread was grilled and the sandwich consisted of grilled butterflied shrimp and fresh-cooked bacon with lettuce and tomato. "It's like a BLT, only better," he said.

My surf and turf was a surprise. The roll was shaped to hold two patties and it looked somewhat like a large pair of sunglasses. Under its grilled cover sat a 3-ounce hamburger patty on the left and a 3-ounce crab cake on the right. Their contrast in color, texture and taste was magnificent.

I ate the crab cake first, for that is my true love. I melted at the taste of large lumps of fresh crab. Halfway through I thought to ask for tartar sauce. The waitress brought the sauce quickly but not before I had finished this quintessential crab cake. Oh, well. The tartar sauce was more like a marie rose sauce, a classic 1970s condiment of mayonnaise with a touch of ketchup, but then it also had relish and a taste of dill.

The burger portion of the sandwich was grilled to perfection. The beef was coarsely ground and

Restaurant review

Schula's Grill and Crab House

★★★★★

Food: 5 stars (out of 5)

Service: 5 stars

Ambiance: 5 stars

Value: 5 stars

Address: 11205 John F. Kennedy Drive, Hagerstown, off Robinwood Drive, east of Hagerstown

Phone: 301-714-1397

E-mail: schulasgrillandcrab@gmail.com

Hours: 1 to 8 p.m. Sunday; lunch from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday to Saturday; dinner 3 to 9:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 3 to 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Type: Grilled meats and seafood

the taste was fresh and meaty. The pickle had a crisp, clean bite and could have come fresh from a New York deli.

And then we saw the coleslaw sitting apart in its white bowl. How had we missed the coleslaw? This slaw was made with cabbage, carrots, and a mayonnaise dressing. The Professor stated his preference for a sour cream-and-yogurt dressing, just like his mother made. I remembered my great aunt making coleslaw dressing with Hellman's mayonnaise, apple cider vinegar and sugar. Coleslaw is one of those comfort foods whose variations are endless and Mom's is always the best. Schula's coleslaw was good, though we both wanted onions in it.

There was a dessert menu which included

Key lime pie, but we had eaten our fill for this day. The Professor wandered over to the bar area of the restaurant and came back with a report.

"They serve Blue Moon Belgian-style wheat beer. It is served with a slice of orange." When I asked what a wheat beer was he said, "Blue Moon is brewed with white wheat and oats and features a crisp wheat finish and the perfect combination of orange peel and coriander."

"Is there no knowledge which is foreign to you?" I teased him.

"I read it on the back label," he confessed.

And he then instructed me on the differences among pilsners and lagers, porters and ales and steam beers.

"We will come back to the bar for more steamed clams and Blue Moon beer," he decided, and I was more than willing to agree. The taste of clams had triggered my desire for more and soon.

While he had been exploring the bar area, I looked around the restaurant. The back wall, painted a raspberry shade, held a model of a marlin. High windows looked out on South Mountain and there was a framed photograph of a long seashore.

Over in the corner by the swinging doors to the kitchen hung a huge roll of butcher paper. On Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, there is all-you-can-eat crabs and that is when the butcher paper covers the simple wooden tables.

Prints of bamboo were on the wall and the service people wore Hawaiian shirts.

Overall, Schula's had a feeling of space and air, of cleanliness and order, almost like a walk along the shore at dusk.

Omni Vore is a pseudonym for a Herald-Mail freelance writer who reviews restaurants anonymously to avoid special treatment.