



Food

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Morin's serves up satisfaction for all tastes

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The shrimp appetizer at Morin's (\$4.50 for one skewer, \$7.99 for two) delights the eye as well as the palate.

ATTLEBORO — For the past 98 years, the Morin family has been satisfying a wide range of appetites in downtown Attleboro seven days a week: breakfast, lunch and dinner .

Jean Baptiste Morin founded the food dynasty in 1911 when he opened a diner in an old cable car. Over the years the business grew and grew until today Morin's Hometown Bar & Grille occupies a huge downtown building. There's still a room in the rambling restaurant that looks like a traditional diner from the 1950s, with padded stools at a long counter and plump vinyl booths where ham and eggs and home fries can be had all day long. But the South Main Street restaurant now encompasses a barroom, with an ornate wooden bar and high tables for dining; a cozy dining room between the diner and the barroom; and a series of function rooms next to the barroom. There's even a room that has a pool table as its centerpiece.

The function rooms, with impressive brick walls and archways and lovely woodwork, are also used for the restaurant's weekend overflow. This is not surprising because of the quality of the food, the care with which it is prepared and the startlingly low prices. At Morin's you can get chicken parmigiana for \$10.50, baked scrod for \$10.99, filet mignon for \$14.99, a rack of barbecued ribs for \$14.50 and a fisherman's stew with fish filet, bay scallops, mussels, baby clams, tomatoes and potatoes served with garlic bread for \$12.30. And all arrive in portions that would satisfy the heartiest appetite. How do they do it?

Bill Morin, who runs the restaurant with his son, John, explained in a later phone call, “We try to do it with volume. That reputation has evolved over the years, going back to my father, of good home-cooked food, good prices and good portions.” He’s at the restaurant much of the day, along with John, to make certain everything is up to snuff.

Because the air-conditioning was on the fritz in the main dining room the night of our visit, where it was 80 degrees and stuffy, we were offered our choice of the other rooms. With 225 seats, it was a difficult choice. The diner area seemed terrific — for breakfast, although breakfast is served all day. The bar area was inviting, but it had those tall chairs we were not fond of. So we chose the smallest of the function rooms, which was actually almost too cool until our wonderfully cheerful waitress, Kristen, offered to turn off the AC fan, which made it very pleasant.

There’s a full bar service, but only two “specialty cocktails” on the drink menu. I can sing the praises of both the Morin’s “Rita” (\$5.50) — its version of a margarita, that was a powerful mix of tequila, Cointreau, lime juice, sour mix and “a splash of cranberry juice” — and the not-as-sweet Morin’s Cosmo (\$6) — Grey Goose L’Orange vodka with triple sec and blood orange juice.

On the appetizer menu, it’s nice that one can order the Mussels & Baby Clams (\$8.99) two ways. Bypassing the one steamed in a lemon-and-white-wine broth with garlic and onion as too ordinary, the shellfish sautéed in a spicy beer broth with bacon and grilled onions served with garlic bread seemed more like it. A pretty bowl painted with water lilies held a large number of mussels and little clams, surprisingly plump despite their shell size. The hearty broth, with just a hint of its beer base, had a bit of a zing, especially the more we dipped the chunks of buttery and garlicky bread into the bottom of the bowl. The bacon and thin strips of onion added a nice heft.

Another appetizer is a single skewer of five shrimp (\$4.50; two skewers for \$7.99) that had been grilled to perfection. It sat on a bed of mixed greens (Swiss chard predominating) with slices of pineapple grilled to a high plane of sweetness thanks to a topping of sugar and cinnamon.

I’d forgotten that my dining companion had ordered a “mug” of San Antonio Chili (\$4.95) until it was set in front of us, but was I ever glad after dipping a spoon into the thick, hearty, temptingly hot, homemade mix of beef and beans, topped with gooey melting cheddar cheese and slices of scallions. Served in a giant coffee cup, the chili won raves. The light, homemade nacho chips on the side were the best I’ve had outside of my favorite homemade chips served at the Il Poquito Mexican restaurant in North Miami Beach.

A rack of barbecued baby back ribs (\$14.50) filled a plate. The tender, falling-off-the-bone pork came with a delicious barbecue sauce on the side, plus crisp French fries and nice coleslaw. The only disappointment: the ribs are normally served with sweet potato fries, but alas, there were none left in the kitchen this night.

The Fisherman’s Stew (\$12.30) was a big bowl of chunks of fish filet, tender bay scallops, mussels, baby clams, tomatoes and cubes of red bliss potatoes in a light, sweet tomato basil broth. The two long slices of buttery garlic bread on the side were perfect for dunking in the broth.

After all that, there wasn’t much room for dessert. But the news that all the desserts are made in Morin’s kitchen proved to be the tipping point. After Kristen raved about the Chocolate Cream Pie (\$3.95) and the New Orleans Bread Pudding (\$4.25), who could resist?

The bread pudding was an enormous serving in a big bowl that had a passel of moist raisins and was topped with a sweet bourbon glaze and whipped cream. Decadent.

The slice of chocolate cream pie was half again as big as anything served elsewhere. A flaky, homemade pie shell was filled with rich, dark-chocolate pudding, then topped with whipped cream frosting and drizzled with chocolate sauce and baby chocolate chips. The only thing more incredible than the pie itself was that I ate every bite, save for one small piece of crust. Well, that would have gone, too, had it not been for the mug of chili I

kept diving into earlier. Memo to me: next time make it a bowl of the chili (\$6.25) and the pie.

Morin's Hometown Bar & Grille, 16 South Main St., Attleboro, Mass. (508) 222-9875; morins1911.com. Casual. Wheelchair accessible. Child seats. Reservations Fri. and Sat. MC, V, AE. Parking lot. Open 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mon.-Sat.; to 3 p.m. Sun. Breakfast all day, lunch after 11 a.m. Appetizers \$4.95 to \$8.99. Entrees \$8.25 to \$14.99. Wines are \$4.99 to \$7.50 by the glass; \$18 to \$25 for a bottle. BILL OF FARE

Dinner for two at Morin's Hometown Bar & Grille might look something like this:

Morin's "Rita"...\$6.00

Morin's Cosmo...\$6.50

Shrimp skewer...\$4.50

Chili mug...\$4.25

Barbecue ribs...\$14.50

Fisherman's Stew...\$12.30

Chocolate cream pie...\$3.95

Total food and drink...\$52.00

Mass. tax...\$3.25

Tip...\$11.00

Total bill...\$66.25

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