

* FAVORITE FLAVORS

Dining in Evansville

THE PERFECT APPETIZER: The tuna sashimi at Bonefish Grill. This Japanese delicacy is served with wasabi, a potent Japanese horseradish, and pickled ginger root.

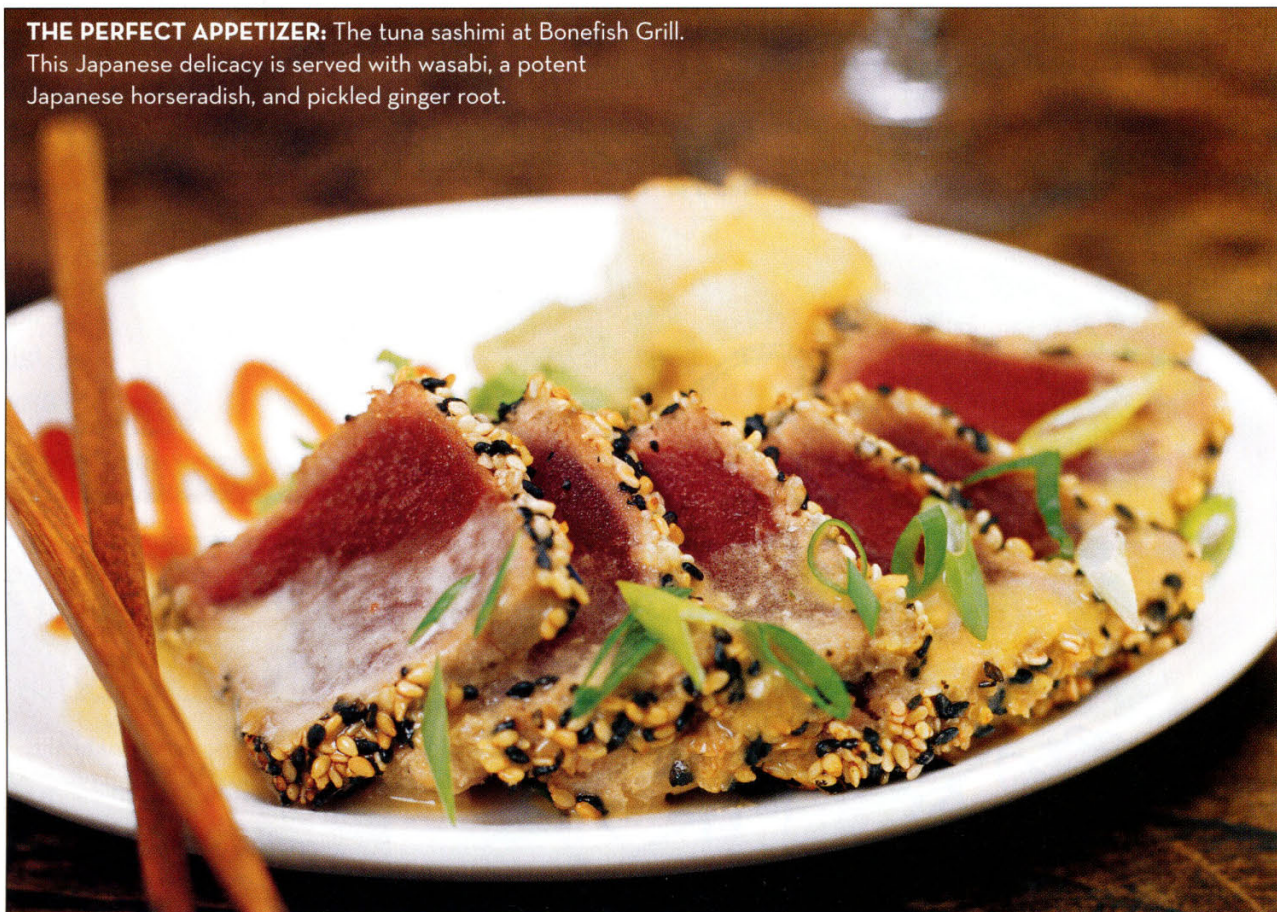


PHOTO PROVIDED BY BONEFISH GRILL

A Moveable Feast

Enjoying the perfect meal, piece by piece

BY SARA ANNE CORRIGAN

LET US, FOR A MOMENT, PRETEND THERE IS A RESTAURANT OUT THERE SOMEWHERE — let's call it "Valhalla Victuals" — where simply wishing for a perfect meal could make it happen.

This is, of course, as improbable as gasoline costing less than \$1 a gallon, but hey, you, get off of my cloud. We do the best we can: When pondering an evening on

the town — or at least dinner there — someone "in charge" picks a restaurant based on several criteria.

Ambience, level of service, menu selections, ethnicity and food quality all are given consideration, as is the cost, most times.

The perfect meal is often defined by no more than one or two of the above components. And many discerning



THE PERFECT DESSERT:
Baklava at The Acropolis.

PHOTO BY BRYAN LEAZENBY

diners will tell you they care more about getting table reservations beforehand than, say, evaluating a wine list, although most are pretty happy when at least there is one. Often, decisions on where to eat are based on the availability and quality of a single item: Barbecued mutton, for instance. Or sushi.

Customizing a single stellar meal to include a favorite dish from several restaurants is an indulgence and one that could make for an entertaining “what if?” table conversation.

Actually traveling to each venue to enjoy a single menu item is impractical except in the world of whimsy, which is where we are headed right now:

Welcome to Valhalla Victuals.

Our fantasy dinner begins with the sashimi appetizer at Bonefish Grill, 6401 E. Lloyd Expressway at Burkhardt Road. The restaurant, deservedly so, was among the “Best of Evansville” winners hailed in the November/December 2005 issue of our sister publication, *Evansville Living*. At Bonefish Grill, you can get an education in gourmet dining, which is how we learned that “sashimi” is the Japanese term for a raw fish delicacy served with compressed nuggets of “sticky rice.” The chefs at Bonefish Grill take a strip of yellow fin tuna and quickly sear it so it’s still raw in the middle; it’s then rolled in black sesame seeds and cut into thin slices. It’s served with soy sauce, wasabi (a potent Japanese horseradish) and pickled gingerroot, just as any self-



THE PERFECT ENTRÉE: The rack of lamb at Raffi's.

PHOTO BY BRYAN LEAZENBY



THE PERFECT SALAD:
The bountiful bar at Cork 'N Cleaver.

PHOTO BY JORDAN BARCLAY

THE PERFECT ENDING: The wine cellar at Madeleine's.

& Bakery, 976 S. Hebron Ave., across the parking lot from the Schnucks at Washington Avenue and Green River Road. The Lorenzo bread sticks, easily 18 inches long and 1-inch thick, are really more like thin baguettes. They border on being addictive.

For an entrée, we elect to head up to 1100 N. Burkhardt Road to Raffi's Restaurant for rack of lamb. Lamb, curiously, is much harder to find than mutton in this part of the country. At one time, you couldn't find it at all; the influx in recent years of people from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern climates has seemed to create a market for lamb and we couldn't be happier. We always order our lamb rare; few things disappoint us more than over-cooked lamb. Fewer still are things that annoy a chef more than being asked to serve "well done" lamb (or steak, for that matter). Go

respecting sushi restaurant would do. A half order is enough for one or two people. A whole order is sufficient for three to four people, or, possibly, a dinner entrée for one.

We will indulge in a salad as our next course, assembled by us from the truly stellar salad bar at the Cork 'N Cleaver, 650 S. Hebron Ave., between Lincoln and Bellemeade avenues. This locally owned restaurant has been a fine dining institution on Evansville's East Side for more than 30 years and the salad bar has never failed to satisfy.

We appreciate how predictably fresh the salad greens are and how little the restaurant depends on iceberg lettuce (known to some as the "polyester of the

salad bowl.") We're also appreciative of the marinated mushrooms, the artichoke hearts, and the slender slices of pepperoni offered among the more common carrot-celery-onion-tomato offerings. The salad dressings are just as terrific. The blue-cheese dressing is noteworthy for its pour-ability, and the salad toppings, including those retro canned French fried onions – the kind that get used in "that green bean casserole" we serve every Thanksgiving – are perfect finishing touches.

The Cork serves some very toothsome dark squaw bread with its salad bar but in this fantasy, we're going to include the bread sticks that, like bouquets, repose in jars on every table inside Lorenzo's Bistro

ahead and have some potatoes and roasted vegetables with your lamb; at Raffi's, it's all good.

Finally, for dessert, we'll circle back to The Acropolis Authentic Greek Cuisine & Spirits at 501 N. Green River Road. Here the choice is simple: Baklava.

This deceptively simple, almost rustic pastry is made with layers of filo pastry leaves, butter (lots of it), ground nuts and cinnamon, arranged in a shallow pan and pre-cut into diamond shapes. As soon as it comes out of the oven, it's drizzled with a generous amount of a citrus-kissed honey-based syrup and allowed to cool. Like lamb, this pastry was not available in these parts until recent times. The portions at the Acropolis are larger than average. Yum.

All the restaurants we've visited in our fantasy dinner trek have good, diverse wine lists (yet another recent development in the city). But right now, we're most intrigued with the wine cellar at Madeleine's A Fusion Restaurant at 423 S.E. Second St. in Evansville's Historic District. Why? Because we're able to sit right down in the room with the racks of bottles as our companions. That the Madeleine's chef will prepare food specifically to the your request, is, well, just icing on the cake. **CV**





Anything less is second best.

www.evvarhomes.com
www.evvcommercial.com

4004 E. Morgan Ave., Evansville, IN 812-471-2525