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## Exotic new spring menu at Mills Tavern

by Don Fowler

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I have always considered Providence's four-star Mills Tavern as one of the finest restaurants in Rhode Island.

A friendly staff, pleasant atmosphere, exciting food presentations, always-fresh ingredients and a chef who displays his talents with standard favorites and always something new and different all make Mills Tavern a special place to visit.

We made our special visit to Mills Tavern last week to sample their new Spring Menu and left knowing that spring has indeed arrived. The evening started with a basket of fresh rolls, including a fennel roll that Joyce could have made a meal of.

The spring salad consisted of salt-roasted baby yellow and chiogga beets with whipped goat cheese and pistachios (\$10), an unusual and tasty combination, which set the tone for the evening. Sauteed frog's legs provençal were next, served in a delicious sauce over an olive crouton (\$12), with an indescribably delicious flavor. I would have loved to have seen the frog, because the legs were as big as a chicken's.

We sampled three of the featured spring menu items, which will be available through June 18. The breast of veal, braised in Bock beer, with semolina gnocchi and ragout of fava beans, English peas, and spring onions melted in your mouth (\$25).

Executive Chef Robert Harrison, who hails from Chicago and is the pride and joy of Mills Tavern, likes to sparingly use "the vibrant colors and fresh flavors of fava beans and English peas. The veal is braised in Bock beer, which is a traditional springtime celebration beer." Harrison also adds fiddleheads, which he says have a very limited growing season and are a traditional New England favorite.

The most unusual item on the menu was the lasagna of braised rabbit, accompanied by fresh water chestnuts, long beans and maitake mushrooms in a sweet sesame hoisin sauce (\$21). We had eaten rabbit before, but never with this exciting combination of textures and flavors.

Our favorite was the cardamom crusted yellowfin tuna with olive oil poached tomatoes and baby artichokes, caper aioli and chervil salad (\$26). Warm and red in the center, a knife was not needed to cut the delicious tuna, an entrée we would strongly recommend.

Dessert wasn't necessary after such a wonderful tasting, but who could resist crème brulee as only Harrison could make it...by far one of the best we have ever tasted.

We were lucky enough to catch the aroma of the slow roasted "half long" duck being served at the next table and to watch the diners rave about the size and taste of the dish, which included fresh water chestnuts. Long beans and maitaki mushrooms, also in a sweet sesame hoison sauce.

At the bar were four people who had ordered the Grand Shellfish Platter (\$44), which looked large enough to serve a football team. We watched the Idaho trout and braised veal being cooked to perfection in the wood-burning stove under the watchful eye of chef Harrison.

You owe it to yourself to enjoy the service and atmosphere of an upscale restaurant like Mills Tavern. The service we received from Walter, our friendly and helpful waiter, who explained every item on every dish with such enthusiasm, added to the evening's enjoyment.

Mills Tavern is located at 10 North Main St. on the East Side of Providence. For reservations call 272-3331. Complementary valet service is available. Visit them at [www.millstavernrestaurant.com](http://www.millstavernrestaurant.com).