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## Place for Adults

### Appetizers make for a happy dinner hour

Fuzio Universal Bistro, which opened at Stockton's Stonecreek Village in early February, features a menu of unique pasta dishes - some fiery and some not so much.

On a recent lunch outing, five girlfriends got together for appetizers, entrées and desserts.

The bright and airy restaurant has an attentive wait staff - eager to share information on happy hour, half-priced wine on Thursdays and other special events.

We were talked into sampling appetizers.

The crispy calamari, \$9.50, is buttermilk battered and quick fried. Calamari can be tough, but not this dish. It comes with a creamy lemon-garlic aioli.

The toasted focaccia is piled high with diced tomato, cambazola cheese and smoked bacon. It's a bargain at \$4.75 but is messy for ladies who lunch.

Firecracker slyders - yes, with a 'y' - feature Fuzio's signature firecracker pork on sweet buns with onion strings on the side. A plate comes with two, perfect to share on a date, but the buns get soggy if they aren't eaten immediately. Firecracker lettuce wraps, on the appetizer menu, are colorful and appear to be low-cal for those watching their waistlines. At \$7.50, this plate was brimming with spicy chicken, portobello mushrooms, water chestnuts, carrot-ginger salad and sauces.

The menu features salads, soups, grilled paninis and pastas. After 4:30 p.m. entrées such as barbecued salmon and chicken marsala are featured.

We chose a blue cheese chicken salad, which we'd sampled previously. Think of it as a Caesar salad with a twist. What makes this salad stand out is the dressing, which is perfectly proportioned. At \$9.50, it's a meal in itself, and chock full of cucumber, romaine lettuce, blue cheese, grilled chicken, penne pasta and more.

The Fuzio firecracker pork fusilli features ginger-braised pork, and firecracker-hot habanero pesto with a dollop of sour cream on top. It's an interesting dish. Stir the sour cream into the pasta and it takes the bite out of the dish's heat. But after a few bites, the fusilli was just too salty to finish in one sitting.

At many restaurants, desserts are a disappointment. Not at Fuzio.

For dessert, the waiter noted that a strawberry shortcake featured freshly whipped cream - made daily, not from a can. The dessert was enormous and topped with fresh berries. Its almond poundcake base was dense and rich, for \$4.50. A tiramisu, also \$4.50, was plenty for two. It was creamy and good to the last bite.

There are 29 bottles of wine on the list and the wait staff are proud of their martinis, which are on the pricey side. During happy hour, from 3 to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, appetizers and draft beers are \$3.

One odd thing about Fuzio is its bathroom setup. The bathroom is unisex. Go into a stall, the door reaches down to the floor, and come out to find yourself washing hands next to someone of the opposite sex. It was a major topic of conversation for moms enjoying bottomless glasses of Diet Coke.

All in all, it was a good lunch in an adult atmosphere - we didn't see a kids' menu here. We vowed to come back for happy hour.