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## **On the Menu: Sizzling steak and sweet serenade**

Tara's Steak and Lobster House serves the whole shebang — sultry dishes and sounds

By Tom Williams

Thursday, August 10, 2006

For a Marco steak house treat, Tara's is tailor-made to deliver. With an atmosphere dedicated to the distinguished, Tara's consistently provides patrons with an upscale flair of the finest aged beef, seafood and lamb.

On Saturday, July 22, family-member tablemates and I arrived at Tara's Steak and Lobster House and were stopped in our tracks by the sultry sounds of "Gary and Fran." The dynamic duo of keyboard and vocals mixing from the bar can easily compel any would-be diner to stop and listen to the live performance percolating from Tara's cocktail lounge. With over six years together, Fran and Gary cover classic standards from pop to country. As well as providing the musical accompaniment, Gary's flair for vocals and harmony add to the dynamics of what can be described as Marco's best female vocalist. With a great range and an ability to cover anyone from Cher to Pasty Cline, Fran truly shines with talent in Tara's cozy Marco venue.

Gary and Fran entertain Friday and Saturday from 6:30 until 11 p.m., with Gary solo on Thursday. The entertainment at Tara's is more than background music as the dance floor is always open and requests are encouraged.

After seared, sizzling aromas beckoned from the dining room, our crowd settled in among the cherry-wood and black-linen theme that offers a hint of the tropics with the elegant lighting that is the essence of Tara's.

Our server, Mike, welcomed our group and brought fresh bread with Tara's special butter containing herbs, shallots and garlic. Tara's signature "Shebang Sauce," is also included, and this combo of tomato, onion, horseradish and honey is a tasty treat that goes well with everything from bread to seafood and steak.

With an impressive arsenal of appetizers from Shrimp Cocktail to Jumbo Lump Crab Cake, Tara's list of starters will easily tease the appetite. However, Tara's wedge of lettuce with blue cheese and bacon is truly a salad that stands out, and a unique combo of beefsteak tomatoes and onions will be a big hit for those who wish to venture outside the normal salad routine.

With a party of seven, we chose the porterhouse for three cooked to medium, and the porterhouse for four ordered medium rare — we had a teenager at home who definitely wanted leftovers. The Porterhouse for three is \$93 and the serving for four is \$ 124.

Tara's offers an extensive wine list featuring a proprietor's selection from premier vineyards. No matter what the taste, entrée or preference, Tara's wine cellar is well equipped to please any palate.

When dinner arrived, the presentation was impressive. Severed atop porcelain platters, the porterhouse entrées sizzled with anticipation as Mike and Lori elegantly served out portions of Chef Javier's culinary perfection.

The servers worked well as a team and ensured everyone was pleased with the individual service of the pre-carved selections. The serving process was performed with a genuine pride and left little doubt as to the quality about to be sampled. When au jus was lovingly spooned out from the sizzling platters, every mouth tableside was instantly watering.

The side dishes at Tara's include creamed spinach, garlic potatoes, cubed potatoes and corn. All the side dishes are a credit to Chef Javier, but special recognition must be mentioned for the creamed spinach.

During the meal, the talent from Gary and Fran continued and poured an ambiance over the dining experience that added yet another flavor to the already perfect evening.

Located at 969 North Collier, Marco Island, Tara's is open for diner from 5:30 until 9 p.m. daily and reservations are recommended (394-0212). Private parties are lovingly arranged, and tucked away alcoves offer semi-private settings for special occasions. More information is available at [www.tarasteakandlobsterhouse.com](http://www.tarasteakandlobsterhouse.com).

In many average steak houses, servers will ask the patrons if they would like steak sauce. The classic answer is: "I hope not," but rest assured, at Tara's the signature Shebang sauce is like the overall Tara's experience: above and beyond the average and bordering on bliss.

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