

chalky cheese to revelatory heights. Shrimp cakes (\$9.95) are a refreshing switch from the ubiquitous crab cake, dill-flecked and delicately ringed by basil and tomato sauces. Veal barley soup (\$3.95) is delectably deep and meaty.

The Obligatory Osso Bucco Accolade

Everyone who's written about Crystal Cafe has said that the osso bucco is either:

- a) the best in South Florida
- b) the best they've ever had
- c) both of the above.

Unanimity of praise makes me skeptical, so I have to admit that I was secretly hoping to discover some flaw that went unnoticed by other reviewers. Imagine my disappointment

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when I decided that the osso bucco here is, indeed, the best I've had. The veal is cooked until it falls off the bone, yet is pink and supple and vividly overlaid with large pieces of vegetables in an intensely – I mean *intensely* – flavorful broth (\$21.95; it used to be \$14.95, but the swank shank went up in price after all the nice words said about it, and who knows, after this review comes out it might go up again, so you'd better hurry and eat it soon. Speaking of pricing, even though its

fame has grown, Crystal Cafe is eminently reasonable in this matter, even more so from 5-6 p.m., when all main courses include soup or salad, coffee, and dessert).

On the Daunting Nature of Desserts

The food at Crystal Cafe is lighter than most Continental fare, but it's not really "light" food per se, and the portions are generous to a fault. This makes the choosing of dessert a daunting proposition. A warm crêpe with crumb topping and berry-sweet interior is a reasonable compromise selection for the well-satiated, as is sorbet or strawberries with zabaglione. A thin wedge of walnut tart is another tasty treat that won't bust your gut, while an above-average tiramisu and chocolate fudge cake are available for the never-say-die sort of diners (desserts are \$4.75).

The establishment's 41st Street neighborhood is a singular enclave that's soon to be chained into one more gentrified strip of stores. Kovaceski needn't worry about such developments, for the Crystal Cafe is a unique haven unto itself, special because of the conscientious gusto with which he prepares his cuisine. As James Beard once said, "The secret of good cooking is, first, having a love of it." ❖