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Schultheis' Carriage House is East Greenville's hidden treasure

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Just below the Lehigh-Montgomery county border, in the rustic stone farmhouse that used to be the Zagat-approved Mediterranean restaurant Campagna, Schultheis' Carriage House opened its doors last February. Word about it was so slow in trickling north that we assumed -- mistakenly as it turned out -- something must be awry and frankly dragged our feet getting there until recently.

Sometimes it's a pleasure to be wrong. Like its predecessor, The Carriage House turns out to be a restaurant to savor. As early as our entrees, tepidations were dispelled and we were in fact ready to cheer. Each course put before us rang true; knowing attention to detail was reflected in what we saw and tasted. The owners have retained the skylight in the main dining room, the bare hardwood floors and the glassed-in wine cellar holding a wide collection of mostly California and Austrian vintages. Charmingly swagged curtains inside and two outdoor dining terraces adjacent to the redwood barn are new. The ambiance, while still muted, seems more inviting than before.

The restaurant bills itself as Continental with an Austrian flair and particularly strong hints of Western Austria's Alpine Tyrol region. It's a full, well-thought-out menu, non-kitschy fun, too, for where have you ever had carpaccio named schlemmer schnitten? To dismiss this as a German or Austrian restaurant, however, would be to miss the point of what Philadelphia chef-owner Bob Schultheis is about.

Bavarian bean soup and a porcini mushroom strudel might be expected appetizers, but shrimp poached in dark beer with fine herbs, oysters baked in pernod, gravlax in a lemon-caper dressing and a stupendous cornmeal and broccoli rabe dish are not. The broccoli rabe was baked inside the cornmeal, then grilled and served under a light blanket of heavenly roasted tomato sauce that resonated with layers of flavor. The carpaccio, as finely shaved meat filet as we've ever seen, came dressed with fresh greens, red onion, capers, horseradish and cornichons. Nicely presented house salads were enhanced by good dressings, one a tangy ranch, the other a mellow Gorgonzola.