

RESTAURANTS



Photo by Grace Sturkosky

SPOTLIGHT UP THE CREEK

This probably comes as no surprise to regular readers, but I love wine. And one of my favorite wine lists in the Verde Valley is at Up the Creek, which, fittingly, is located just down the road from several wineries in bucolic Page Springs. During our most recent visit, there were more than 50 wines on the menu, and the vast majority were available by the glass. The menu features wines from around the world including many from Arizona. It was warm during our visit, and Mario Aguilar, partner and wine extraordinaire, recommended the 2013 Scarpetta Friuli – Italy’s version of sauvignon blanc. It was fruity without being sweet, and the wine, along with the view of Oak Creek, set the tone for an enjoyable evening.

It feels like you’re dining in the boughs of cottonwood and sycamore trees at Up the Creek, though the dining room is enclosed. You’re perched above Oak Creek and large windows provide glimpses of the ducks and trout below. There are hummingbird feeders at each window, so it truly feels like dinner and a show. (The trees and the creek are softly lit at night, so even at this time of the year, you’ll have a view.) Chef Jim O’Meally, who occasionally takes a seat at the piano, much to the delight of his guests, calls his menu “international fusion cuisine.” Our recommendations include the Louisiana Étouffée featuring shrimp, smoky andouille sausage, chunks of crawdad meat and the “Cajun holy trinity”: onions, bell pepper and celery. It’s served over rice pilaf. The slightly spicy dish is a great homage to New Orleans cuisine. The Medallions of Venison were a pleasant surprise. We aren’t big fans of game meat, but the venison tasted more like tender, lean, rare steak. It was topped with a blueberry sauce and served with creamy, cheesy soubise rice. My dining companion declared it one of the best two dishes she’d had all year.

Don’t leave without ordering the Buttermilk Pie. Part pie, part cake, it’s a traditional southern specialty, and it’s not at all sour like the name might imply. It’s light and sweet and satisfying. Up the Creek might be a bit off the beaten (read: tourist) path, but it’s well worth seeking out, especially if you appreciate leisurely meals, wine ... and buttermilk pie. – *Erika Ayn Finch*

UP THE CREEK, 1975 N. Page Springs Road in Page Springs. Open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to close, for lunch and dinner. MC, Visa, AmEx, Disc (928-634-9954) (INEXPENSIVE TO VERY EXPENSIVE)