

BROWARD REVIEW

At Billy's: delectable claws, view

BY ROCHELLE KOFF
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Bring on the claws. And the tangy mustard dip. Stone crab season is here, and we can't wait to indulge.

Our destination is Billy's Stone Crab Restaurant and Market, a premier Hollywood spot for the sunset-colored claws, famous for their sweet, succulent meat.

Billy's gets its delectable crustaceans, thousands of pounds each week, from the Keys and Southwest Florida. If you don't want a fancy meal, you can grab the claws in the on-site market and either eat them there or take them home.

But it's certainly worth lingering. Billy's has the benefit of a stunning Intracoastal view whether you sit outside by the water or on the second-floor, split-level dining room, which has floor-to-ceiling windows (for a prime spot, arrive early).

With its accommodating servers (waiters in full tuxedos, waitresses in white tuxedo shirts with black bowties) and classic bar (which serves killer martinis), the atmosphere is reminiscent of another era, with an Old Florida gentility.

Diners might also be reminded of Miami Beach's Joe's Stone Crab, and with good reason. Restaurant founder Billy Hershey got his start at Joe's before going out on his own. He's been in the crab business for nearly four decades, running a few seafood markets and restaurants in the Miami area, before he opened Billy's in Hollywood 15 years ago.

If you haven't been here recently, the restaurant just finished a \$200,000 renovation project to spruce up the exterior and other areas, part of efforts by Hollywood's Community Redevelopment Agency to enhance the area before the beach resort Margartaville opens. Billy's also updated its cozy wine room, mostly used for private parties, with mahogany-refrigerated units that hold 600 bottles of wine.

Not surprisingly, stone crabs are the star here — at least until the seven-month season is over on May 15. We went for the jumbos, which are full of delectable, plump white meat. There's no hard work involved. The claws are cracked just before serving so the juices don't escape. Just add a squirt of lemon and a dip into homemade mustard sauce and



they're heavenly.

Diners usually pair the claws with traditional sides like hash browns (one of seven potato choices), broccoli Hollandaise or their zingy cole slaw.

Stone crabs are considered a renewable resource because the crabs can re-grow harvested claws, but they are a huge splurge. This week, diners at Billy's paid \$21.95 for seven medium claws; \$34.95 for six, slightly bigger selects; \$44.95 for five large claws; \$69.95 for four jumbos; and \$89.95 for four colossal. All-you-can-eat medium claws are \$59.95 (no sharing or to-go bags). And appetizer-portion claws are available for less.

Beyond stone crabs, the menu offers just a few landlubber options, such as steak, chicken teriyaki plus surf-n-turf (with New York strip or filet mignon with lobster), but there's plenty of fresh fish and seafood. Most dishes are a la carte.

Round out your meal with starters like crunchy coconut shrimp. We'd skip the bland stuffed mushrooms next time, but we found another hit — wonderful fried oysters, a generous serving of fresh-shucked bivalves from Apalachicola, served with chunky cocktail and tartar sauces, a good value at \$12.95.

Just about all the fish served here comes from Florida waters, including grouper, black grouper, mahi mahi and yellowtail snapper. Some options are rich renditions, like the Key West platter, which features a broiled, flavorful yellowtail (the fish of the day), with lump crab meat and shrimp sautéed in a beurre blanc with a garnish of sliced avocados. For a lighter choice, try the ocean-fresh snapper with an herb sauté or sliced almonds. Sea scallops are nicely seared, but could use more seasoning.

A must-have is a wonderfully creamy Key lime pie, which is shipped from a Key West bakery, with just the right amount of pucker — another Florida tradition.



FRESHLY SHUCKED: A platter of Billy's oysters.

If you go

Place: Billy's Stone Crab Restaurant and Market

Address: 400 N. Ocean Dr., Hollywood

Rating: ★★★ (Very Good)

Contact: 954-923-2300; www.crabs.com

Hours: Noon-10 p.m. daily (closed six weeks, from September to mid-October). Retail market noon-7 p.m. daily.

Prices: Appetizers \$6.95-\$8.95, entrees \$10.95-\$44.95; stone crabs, Alaskan king crabs and lobster market price, sides \$4.95-\$8.95, desserts \$2.25-\$7, kids (12 and under) \$5.95-\$10.95.

FYI: Stone crab shipping available; full bar; \$20 corkage; "wine room" for private parties; self or metered parking; dock area. No reservations but courtesy hold (call ahead to put your name on waiting list). AX, MC, VS.