

Dine with An Imagineer: Disney Dining Review

by *Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor*

As a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel, I sometimes receive questions about unique experiences that most guests haven't done. One of my favorites is "Dine with an Imagineer," which takes place on select days at Walt Disney World.

It gives guests an opportunity to dine with one of the magic makers from Walt Disney Imagineering.

Dine with an Imagineer takes place during lunch at the Hollywood Brown Derby in Disney's Hollywood Studios, or during dinner at the Flying Fish Cafe at Disney's BoardWalk. In both cases, a member of Walt Disney Imagineering will be there for an informal discussion about developing attractions, resorts, shops, restaurants, or cruise ships for Disney Parks and Resorts during the course of the meal. I had the privilege of experiencing this over lunch at the Brown Derby.

At the Brown Derby, the event takes place at 11:30 am and is usually offered on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It is typically a little over two and a half hours long. When I did this, I went to the Brown Derby lobby where I received my Dine with an Imagineer name tag and was asked to wait. Shortly after 11:30, we were given a short but awesome tour of the Brown Derby and then led to the Bamboo Room. The Bamboo Room is a secluded private dining room and is gorgeous. It's almost a perfect setting for the event and has one long table; the only thing bad about the location is that when there is a loud show going on outside by the Sorcerer's Hat the music and noise can be heard inside. When I went, the Disney Imagineer sat at one end of the table but I was told that some Disney Imagineers sit in the middle of the table (which I think would work best).

Lunch was a four course meal consisting of soup, salad, an entree, and a dessert. Soup was a Portsmouth lobster bisque, though guests could also order chicken noodle soup if desired. The salad was a small serving of the Brown Derby's famous Cobb Salad. For the entree, guests had a choice of:

- Char-grilled filet of beef with Cotswold butter over fingerling potatoes, asparagus, Ugly Ripe tomatoes, and a broken Carbernet-shallot vinaigrette
- Noodle bowl with a grilled breast of chicken, soy beans, sugar

snap peas, bok choy, and Shitake mushrooms in a red curry broth
 • Coriander-dusted grouper, cauliflower risotto, fresh English peas, crunchy sunchokes, and a yellow tomato coulis

For dessert, guests could choose either the Brown Derby's famous grapefruit cake or a double vanilla bean creme brulee. I went with what was basically a filet mignon and the grapefruit cake. The filet mignon was absolutely wonderful and I enjoyed every bite. I wasn't a fan of the grapefruit cake and wished I had gotten the creme brulee; however, most guests at the table ordered the cake and seemed to absolutely love it.

The food, except for the grapefruit cake, was excellent. I have to also say that the service was exceptional! However, the highlight of the meal was interacting with the Disney Imagineer. My group had the privilege of having lunch with Disney Imagineer Dan Flynn, a Show Program Manager. Dan started with the Disney Company in 1989 on the Walt Disney World College Program; he worked in Downtown Disney, the Magic Kingdom, and Epcot. In 1998 he joined Walt Disney Imagineering and first worked on the construction of Test Track. Besides Test Track, some of the other attractions he has worked on include Mission Space, Journey into Imagination with Figment, Mickey's PhilharMagic, Expedition Everest, Turtle Talk with Crush, and Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor. He was also heavily involved in the development of Disney's new resort, Aulani, and he spent a lot of time in Hawaii away from his family in Orlando.

Dan was charming, enthusiastic, and witty. He told us that a Show Program Manager for Walt Disney Imagineering provides management of the show design, production, and installation and provides a conduit to the Facility and Ride teams on the project. He shared his experiences working at Disney and told us about the many projects he worked on at all of the parks in Walt Disney World and at Aulani in Hawaii. For example, he told us how Expedition Everest has no elevators in it, and how he constantly had to climb up to 17 stories, throughout his work on the attraction. He also spent a lot of time talking about Walt Disney Imagineering in general and the path that some people take to become Disney Imagineers. It was interesting to find out that Walt Disney Imagineering is made up of over 140 disciplines, each with its own set of responsibilities when it comes to completing a project.

Although Dan could not share any trade secrets or talk about any future projects, he answered all of our questions. In my lunch group, all of the other guests were Disney fanatics like me, which led to a very enjoyable lunch interacting with Dan and everyone else at the table. At

the end of our meal, each guest received a commemorative plate depicting Sorcerer Mickey signed by Dan, in addition to a personalized menu and the name tag I previously mentioned.

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□ I highly recommend experiencing Dine with an Imagineer if you are interested in learning a little bit about how the magic is brought to life. The meal is absolutely delicious and the opportunity to interact with a Disney Imagineer over a couple of hours is fantastic, especially if you are a fan of Disney Parks and Resorts. Guests of all ages can attend (there was a baby at the session I went to), but I personally think this experience is best for teenagers and up. The Disney Imagineer won't speculate about anything that might come to Walt Disney World in the future, but he or she will be able to share a lot of information on current and past attractions and the development of them. Since the group size is very limited for each opportunity, you will definitely want to make a reservation as soon as possible. Reservations can be made by calling 407-WDW-DINE or by booking online.

About The Author: Bernie Edwards lives in Maryland with his wife and two children. He is an engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel. He enjoys visiting both Walt Disney World and Disneyland, and sailing on the Disney Cruise Line.

Article last updated: 03-30-2012

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