

| **DESIRED SERVICE** |

*Poor service in restaurants can embarrass executives who take their colleagues and clients to lunch or dinner. Unfortunately, restaurant reviewers tend to devote little space to service, which means businesses are often in the dark about which restaurants to patronize. In hopes of shedding light on service in establishments that have received solid food reviews and cater to business customers, we're introducing a new department in which service will be the sole focus.*

*Patrons should expect front-of-house staff — servers, hosts, busboys, bartenders and managers — to take pride in their profession. Is their attire appropriate? Are they well groomed? Do they understand the menu? Can they describe ingredients and how food is prepared? Can they pair wine with food? Do they conduct themselves properly in the dining room? Are they attentive? Are they interested in making the customer's visit pleasant? These are the questions we will address.*

*Our reviewer has more than 25 years experience as a waiter, owner, manager, maître d' and sommelier; he was trained in a four-star restaurant in upstate New York and has helped open four successful restaurants in Napa and Sacramento. He will remain anonymous in order to avoid preferential treatment, as lovely as it may be.*

## Esquire Grill

I was pleasantly surprised (earlier visits left a lot to be desired) with the service at Esquire Grill, a favorite haunt of politicians and businesspeople, during two recent visits with a guest.

<b>1213 K STREET</b>
<b>916.448.8900</b>
LUNCH & DINNER MON THRU FRI

On each visit, the reservation host honored my requests for specific tables, and we were happily greeted by the hostess and manager as we walked in the door. During lunch, I was impressed by the line of servers standing ready to escort customers to their tables; the approach ensured that the vestibule was only moderately crowded during the busy lunch hour. However, I wish someone had pulled out the chairs at our table. (Unfortunately, this is no longer done at most restaurants.)

The server's wild hair and dangly earrings detracted from the somewhat formal ambiance that attracts business customers to the restaurant, and we were surprised to see some wrinkled uniforms.

The servers knew the menu fairly well, though our lunchtime server should have been as descriptive about the clam chowder as she was with the other specials — the soup was outstanding, with a good balance of clams and potatoes in a creamy base.

Beware of fish tales. My dining companion was intrigued to hear that the Dungeness crab on the Crab Louie salad was from Monterey Bay, as com-

mercial crab season in California did not open until Nov. 15, several weeks after our meal. Most likely, the crab was caught in British Columbia or Alaska and shipped to Sacramento.

Business customers would benefit from a slightly more attentive staff. I observed busboys merely pretending to work, carrying empty trays past dirty tables. I also noticed that our server was responsible for inside and outside sections during dinner, affecting her attention to presentation. Case in point: My guest, a low-carb dieter, asked that the swordfish be served without the potato and instead be accompanied by cauliflower. The small portion of fish was presented without garnish on a large white plate, and the cauliflower was in a separate dish. Both would have appeared more appetizing with even a rudimentary sprinkle of chopped parsley.

Despite these foibles, our servers were pleasant and professional. Our lunchtime server was especially good; she observed our progress from a distance, ensuring that courses were delivered at the right time and temperature.

Overall, I would recommend Esquire Grill. In addition to the friendly service (which merited a 14 percent tip), the restaurant's design and acoustics — along with ample distance between tables — allow patrons to conduct business without being overheard by other customers.