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THE SPOT

## Small's Smokehouse and Oyster Bar

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By Jerry Cronin

### Correspondent

Small's Smokehouse and Oyster Bar is not in an obvious place for a restaurant.

Sitting just south of Old Dominion University on Hampton Boulevard, the recently opened restaurant doesn't share real estate with any similar eateries or businesses that might complement or draw attention toward a trip to Small's. But that isn't exactly a bad thing, as the oyster house is easy to get to, has ample parking, and based on our visit, has a satisfying menu.

In fact, the restaurant is housed in a simple but effective space that could easily sit somewhere on the Eastern Shore. Light coral walls, a small bar, oyster house signs, a mural, and photos of Grandpa Small on the Maury High football team give it a homey, local feel.

The menu, mostly seafood and barbecue, has a similarly familiar feeling. Oysters, shrimp and grits sit side by side with brisket and pulled pork. These are rounded out by a few Southern sides, plus local O'Conner's and Smart-mouth brews on tap.

As Small's calls itself an oyster house, we began our evening with the area's favorite bivalve and ordered a half dozen of them steamed (\$10). They came out perfectly, with the shells just popped open from the heat. The oysters were hot and slightly firmed up from steaming in their own shells. The accompanying horseradish butter sauce was subtle, deceptively creeping up as my taste buds kicked into gear. The cocktail sauce also had a nice zing to it.

Another starter, the smoked tuna dip (\$6), was also a winner as the tuna was blended with mayo and cheese and served with warm tortilla chips.

Moving onto the main courses, we ordered the Farmhouse Platter (\$16) and Small Jr.'s Seafood Platter (\$18) for an impromptu surf and turf for the table.

The turf side was good, made by a chef who does an excellent job with smoking and seasoning. The Farmhouse Platter carried tenderly smoked brisket and pulled and chopped pork. The pig had nice heat and a vinegar kick to it while the chicken had a slight bit of pepper heat and a lovely smoke flavor. The surf side, consisting of shrimp, oysters and flounder, was fried very well with both the shrimp and oysters having a sweet, salty flavor. My only complaint was I thought the price was a bit much for the portions.

As for the side, the collards were different but good, as they were done with chicken instead of smoked pork. The coleslaw was heavy on mayonnaise, but also good. The mac and cheese was a serviceable version, but not over the top.

My only disappointment was with the onion rings. The frying was spot on, but there was no flavor to go along with the perfect crunchy texture.

According to our server, the general manager also owns a bakery in Portsmouth, so we had to go with the toffee cupcake for dessert. The rich devil's food cupcake was topped with whipped butter cream and crumbled toffee. It was finished with a caramel drizzle and was an excellent finish to an enjoyable meal.

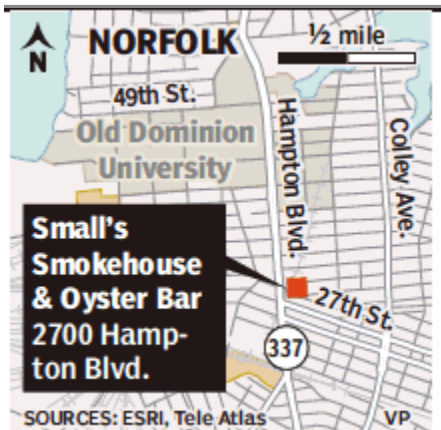
Small's is a pleasant little place with friendly staff and a neighborhood feel.

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An oyster plate at the recently opened Small's Smokehouse and Oyster Bar on Hampton Boulevard in Norfolk.



## the spot

Small's Smokehouse and Oyster Bar, 2700 Hampton Blvd., Norfolk

the vibe

Neighborhood place with a bit of the Eastern Shore combined with an inland smokehouse.

to try

Go with the smoked tuna dip as an appetizer. It is different and very good.

## if you go

Hours 10 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 10:30 a.m. to midnight Fridays and Saturdays

Cost Appetizers, raw bar, \$6 to \$17; soups, salads, sandwiches, \$5 to \$10; entrees, \$13 to \$18; desserts, \$4 to \$8

Reservations Yes

Parking Parking lot

Child friendly Highchairs, boosters, menu

Phone 626-3440

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