

# Spirit of Great Cuisine

EXPANDING ITS FOCUS, ADAM'S PLACE REMAINS TRUE TO FINE FOOD. by Marina Taylor

Stepping from the bright, hot downtown sidewalk into Adam's Place's cool interior is a luxury. Soft music, quiet sophisticated bustle, dark polished wood and brocade upholstery: Luxury is what Adam's is all about. The tables are set with creamy white linens and crystal glassware, and the wait staff in their crisp black and white uniforms are gently formal and dedicatedly polite. The space splits into three separate zones, each with its own atmosphere. The lounge area and bar to the left feels less formal, with smaller tables and an after work crowd. The regular dining room and the banquet room curl around a fireplace, muffled from the kitchen and from the neighboring Luna. Luna is the swank nightclub side project on the right. In the past seven years Adam's has expanded from food into a stronger focus on drinks, winning awards for its martinis and kudos from *Wine Spectator* for its wine lists.

Great food, however, has not been neglected. I appreciate the menu: It is simple and readable, listing the main elements of the dishes without giving so much information that the essence of the dish gets lost. It resists the tendency of some formal restaurants to list every single spice and condiment. Many familiar names pop out, such as Greener Pastures Poultry, Alsea Acres Goat Cheeses, local free-range beef. If fish were certifiable

as organic, the menu would be close to 95 percent certified organic.

The first course selections include Cedar-Scented Salmon Salad (try saying that three times fast), Manilla Clams Agave and, of course, the ever impressive Cambazola Fondue (\$11), which has been on Adam's menu from its inception: When you find a recipe like this, you keep it in your repertoire. Big, tender buttered garlic croutons surround a bread bowl overflowing with melted cheese and fresh herbs. The flavor is insistent, tangy even, but creamy and so smooth it melts in your mouth. Little ghostly squares of cheese rind float with the herbs.

When the entrees arrive, they make an even bigger splash with their flashy presentation and exciting flavors. The Toasted Sesame Encrusted Hawaiian Ahi (\$20) was a vision to behold, picture perfect with fried noodles in a towering confection over a pat of jasmine rice, heaps of flowery pink pickled ginger and lime-green wasabi. The fish is buttery smooth, crusted in bi-colored sesame seeds, delicious and very delicate.

The Vegetarian Trio (\$18) is less lovely to look at, but perhaps more creative. It consists of a roasted, stuffed chard leaf filled with a white bean salad, grilled eggplant on a bed of soft sweet zucchinis, and a sugar snap pea and slivered carrot salad with a rich, thick chervil-mint pesto-like dressing.

Each on their own are wonderful and well thought out, however they lack something to tie them all together. The dish's only unifying theme is its lack of meat. As a first course, the Veggie Trio would be interesting and satisfying; as an entree it doesn't stand up. Unfortunately, until the new menu comes out this month, it is the only vegetarian entree.

At dessert I fall in love all over again. The choices are difficult. One particularly tempting option is the Chocolate Volcano, a molten centered soufflé for two. It has to be ordered with your entree, as it needs about half an hour of preparation time. Eat lightly before you dare to tread there. I opted instead for the Maple Crème Brûlée. It is a clever and surprising twist on a traditional creme brûlée. The usual crisp caramel topping is instead mixed with almonds to make a thin, delicate praline bowl, with a serving of maple flavored custard tucked

inside. The whole meal is set at a slow pace, meant to be savored, not rushed. I like that there is never a feeling of trying to clear out the table for the next wave of diners.

Eugene offers a few great restaurants for special occasions, places to celebrate or indulge, to share with friends from bigger cities or show off to relatives. Adam's Place stepped into that category when it opened seven years ago. Though it has gone through changes, focusing on its drink list and adding Luna, the dedicated spirit of great cuisine treated with respect and creativity remains true.

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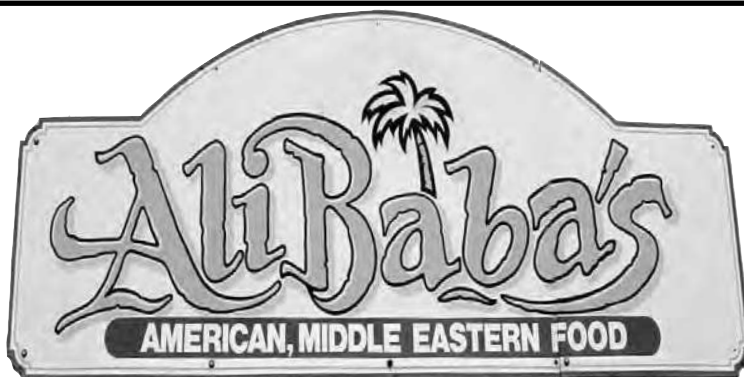


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