

May 22, 2018

PACIFIC STANDARD TIME

151 W. Erie St.
312-736-1778

4 diners @ 6:30 pm

Cuisine: American hearth cuisine. Two wood-burning ovens. "Focused on produce," says Kelly, our waitress. "Fresh, clean, light. Local and California."

Opened: 5/1/18

Chef: Erling Wu-Bower (Avec, Publican, Nico Osteria)

Owners: One Off partnering with Underscore Hospitality

THE PLACE

Previously La Tavernita, which practically glowed in the dark. The entire room was gutted. It is now light, bright, white, cream colors. Airy and spacy. Still manages to be noisy. High ceiling, wood beams, not industrial. Completely open kitchen runs the entire length of the room. There are a few very cool kitchen-bar tables. A huge liquor bar anchors the room.

There is a large room for private events, undoubtedly used for general seating on busy nights.

BTW: The place was pretty damned busy for a Tuesday night in the city. PST is not on Rush Street. Not on Randolph Street. Not on Hubbard Street. It is on the not very pedestrian-friendly corner of Erie and LaSalle. And by the time we leave, around 8:30-9, it's a madhouse.

HOSPITALITY and SERVICE

About two minutes after we are seated, I make my signature move and ask for a different table. One that will make me feel inside the restaurant instead of so close to the door. No problem. In fact, the hostess thanked me for telling her that I did not like our placement. That's a first.

Kelly tells us upfront, the kitchen is out of the starter fishes listed on the menu. PST flies them in from Tsukiji fish market in Japan. Did not come in this day.

Service is attentive without being intrusive; the meal is well paced and spaced out. Share plates come with serving utensils. Yay!

MENU

I like the size of the menu. Reminds me a bit of the **concise menu** at S.K.Y. and **no crazy category names**. Thank you. Is sanity in menus making a comeback?

Everything is meant to be shared. “Collectives” feed 2-3 (Slagel Farm rib eye) or 3-5 (whole roasted duck). (OK, “Collectives” is a marginally goofy category name.)

A key across the bottom of the menu explains **the codes**:
(GF) gluten free / *available gluten free / (V) vegetarian / (VE) vegan

**Why does everyone get a dinner menu, but only one person gets the wine list?
STOP THAT!**

THE MEAL

STARTERS

Wood fired pita served with . . . \$14
eggplant, roasted pepper, basil, whipped robiolina (V*)

The **wood-fired pita is the category**, if you will. It comes with marinated ahi tuna, or the eggplant (which we ordered), or beef tartare. Straight from one of the wood-fired ovens, the pita rounds are **hot and puffy and blistered**. Probably anything folded into these beauties would taste terrific.

That said, we **loved the eggplant**. Roasted peppers and basil made it **more Med than West Coast**, but who cares?

avocado salad \$12
cucumber, coralline endive, shabazi–sour cream vinaigrette

Shabazi, a **Yemenite-inspired spice blend** takes this combo to the Middle East. The avocado was creamy perfection but I found the vinaigrette too . . . well, vinegary. And I **didn't care for the marinated texture of the cucumber**. **Toasted mustard seeds** sprinkled everywhere were a delightful crunch factor.

County line harvest lettuce \$12
cucumber, tahini-miso vinaigrette, lentil sprouts

Tahini meets miso, or Middle East meets Far East, notes my fabulously observant foodie friend. A clever combo of flavors but **this did not rock my world**. Just a nice salad.

English peas & Burrata \$15
Walnut vinaigrette, farro verde, walnut, spoon mustard (V)*

And along comes farro, a grain from ancient Egypt. Lots of Asian influence in the starters. This was a “wow!” A pool of olive oil glistened in the thick slab of superfresh Burrata and the peas made me wonder why I didn’t like peas as a kid. Walnut vinaigrette brings everything brilliantly together. We double-purposed the pita here to excellent effect. I assume you can order sides of pita à la carte.

I would return to PST just for the peas and Burrata with a side of pita. A plate full of fresh popping flavors.

PASTA

Dungeness crab chitarra \$19

Ramp, tomato, pancetta

Full disclosure. My friend ordered this, gluten free, and he ate the whole thing before I thought to ask for a bite. He liked it. Well, yeah. He inhaled it.

On my next visit to PST, I will explore the pizza and pasta sections of the menu.

MAINS

Mt Lassen trout \$27

Asparagus, sungold tomato, radish, green chile, cashew

Mt Lassen trout is like saying Slagel Farm pork. Good to know.

Mt Lassen Trout Farm is in Paynes Creek, CA. Since it’s a trout farm, I’m guessing they raise trout all year. I hope so because this was really good stuff. Hearty and delicate at once. The cashews took the place of butter for richness and the crispy skin (yes, I love crisp fish skin) is a layer of toasted ground sushi rice. A revelation.

Roasted skirt steak \$28

Salt baked new potato salad, pea purée, ramp, salsa macha

Trend alert: macha-infused sauces, salad dressings, ice creams . . .

We ordered this medium rare. Some of the pieces were medium rare but some others were coasting to medium. I am not a proponent of steak dishes that are sliced and I hope this style of serving steak is a passing phase. The steak was flavorful—the macha salsa gave the flavor a whole new dimension—but it could have and should have been pinker and juicier. But let’s talk about those potatoes. Mashed, smashed, and burnt to a pleasant crisp. A table fave.

DESSERTS

Pastry chef **is Natalie Saben** (from Grace)

Four winners. Creative but approachable. And they were all killer light.

Huckleberry sundae \$11

Buttermilk cake, spiced meringue, honey ice cream, basil

I love pound cake textures and generally unsweet desserts, so I was in heaven with the buttermilk cake in the huckleberry sundae. Huckleberry, btw, is one bright flavor of ice cream.

Burnt olive oil cake \$10

Lemon curd, cara cara orange, crème fraîche ice cream

Ditto for the **olive oil cake**, especially its **crusty edges**.

Harry's berries strawberries \$14

Sunflower cotton cake, strawberry syrup, chartreuse ice cream, oxalis (a flowering plant)

Ditto for the **sunflower cotton cake**. This was particularly pretty but the **chartreuse ice cream didn't do it for me**. Hard to discern it's subtle flavor. Creamy though.

Toasted vanilla macaron \$10

Banana semifreddo, gianduja ganache (hazelnut), candied hazelnuts

I was too full. My companions happily destroyed it without me.

THOUGHTS

A really **cool place** with **a well curated bar program** and a seriously smart kitchen. The small and satisfying menu covers a lot of ground. Great focus on cooking techniques, flavors, and hospitality.

A breath of fresh air at a time when a lot of restaurant menus are starting to look and sound alike.