

THE ANNUAL BEAUTY ISSUE • JAYDE NICOLE

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THE PARADISO GIRLS

THESE GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN

(Dine)

Beautiful Cuisine

Café Juanita
9702 NE 120th Place
Kirkland, WA 98034
(425) 823-1505

By Jacklyn Tran photos by The Image Pharmacy

The complexities of food are unlike those of any other substance. The ability to nourish the body, enrich the mind and fill our hearts are just some of food's powers. But seeing food as a form of expression, as an art, is reserved for those with a greater passion for cuisine. This month, DList set out to find not just fabulous food to satisfy the taste buds, but food that is also pleasing to the eye. The end result was five great restaurants with five great chefs that were delighted to share their works of art with us.

For a little northern Italian cuisine, we stopped in at Café Juanita to find a light appetizer. Taking in the understated elegance of the slightly rustic décor and a dining area that looks out to a lush green garden, I was not so much prepared to be

awestruck by the dish that came out. The grilled octopus antipasti (\$14) with fennel, chickpeas and green sauce came out beautifully. A bright green sauce served as the base with chickpeas over it while the awesome tentacles of the oc-

topus were expertly draped on top. The octopus was incredibly tender to bite into, with a lightly charred surface that contrasted well with the smoothness of the chickpeas and creamy essence of the green sauce.

Barking Frog
 14582 NE 145th Street
 Woodinville, WA 98072
 (425) 354-4529



If the drive out of the city to get to Barking Frog isn't calming enough, the tranquility of the scenery surrounding the restaurant may do the trick. The restaurant courtyard is covered overhead by sprawling grape vines, while soothing sounds from the patio fountain can be heard in the background. Indoors, a circular fireplace invites you to a comfortable meal alone or calls for a gathering of family and friends for a celebration.

On a warm sunny summer day, the red beet salad was exquisitely perfect (\$12). The brilliant colors and details of each component

created a refreshing and bright beginning to a meal. The flavorful and juicy beets were supplemented by the toasted local hazelnuts, a creamy Laura Chenel goat cheese, baby arugula, all brought together by the citrusy sweetness of orange segments and a vanilla honey drizzle.

The Sichuan pepper and coriander-crusted ahi (\$34) came out with an enticing and deep color. One bite of all the dish's elements revealed a full-bodied richness, which strays from the typically lighter versions of an ahi plate. With tender braised short ribs shar-

ing the spotlight, baby bok choy, king oyster mushrooms and a sweet Asian barbeque sauce, this plate was satisfyingly complete.

The risotto stuffed quail (\$32) was a picture of perfection. Two flawlessly browned quails sat on either side of a plate separated by a row of vividly colored heirloom cherry tomatoes and bufala di ricotta. It was then drizzled with a 10-year balsamic and lemon olive oil. My first bite of the tender quail was enhanced by the creamy texture of the risotto with occasional bursts from the tomatoes that made for a hearty dish.



- Red Beet Salad (\$12)
- Sichuan Pepper and Coriander Crusted Ahi (\$34)
- Risotto Stuffed Quail (\$32)
- Grilled Octopus Antipasti (\$14) opposite

(Dine)

Ponti Seafood Grill
3014 3rd Avenue N
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 284-3000



Next stop was just south of the Fremont Bridge at Ponti Seafood Grill. A warmly decorated, Mediterranean-inspired dining area overlooks a scenic ship canal. A glance at the menu unveiled a surprising trend of Asian flavors incorporated in some of the dishes. The fennel

seed crusted pan seared halibut (\$28) made a bold statement with its vibrant colors. With a heirloom tomato peperonata, halibut, a shaved fennel salad and basil oil topping it off, the flavor was a true reflection of the vision before me; vibrant, full and bold.

● *Fennel Seed Crusted Pan Seared Halibut* (\$28)

● *Seafood Stew* (\$21)

● *Lamb Sausage with Carnaroli Rice* (\$17)



Volterra
5411 Ballard Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98107
(206) 789-5100

“One of my favorite restaurants” is the way Rachel Ray describes Volterra, a Ballard restaurant with a Tuscan-inspired menu. After trying some of the entrees at this endearing establishment with its inviting décor and friendly staff, it’s easy to see why. As a true seafood lover, I was excited to see seafood stew (\$21) on the menu. Mussels, clams, scallops, prawns and the day’s fresh fish which happened to be salmon, was in a saffron-scented tomato broth with fresh fennel finishing it off. This healthy serving absolutely fit the bill. I was only able to admire the beauty of the delightfully heaping bowl for seconds before digging in. Even on a full stomach, one wouldn’t be able to resist a broth-soaked bite of the toasted Tuscan bread. The fresh flavors of the shellfish and tender fish were only further accentuated by toasted almonds that gave even more of a warmth to it.

Not to be outdone was the house-made lamb sausage links baked in a sweet pepper tomato sauce over a parmesan carnaroli rice with fresh English peas and grated pecorino romano (\$17). Cutting into the sausage released a mouth-watering whiff of what was to come. The sausage was an explosion of fresh, powerful but now overpowering flavor that was balanced perfectly by the creamy rice and tomato sauce. A must try.



Finally, we end our search for beautiful food with dessert from Matt's in the Market. Where better than a quaint little restaurant overlooking the Pike Place Market clock and Elliott Bay. The strawberry shortcake (\$7) was a good start to a great end. The cream biscuit was mild and crumbly and the local strawberries used were macerated in a strawberry and elderflower liqueur. The traditional and classic dessert came with a buttery mas-

carpone cream with a hint of vanilla, making it richer in flavor.

Next up was the mocha ice cream torte (\$9), Matt's in the Market's take on the ice cream cake. It was a square of pure joy. Chocolate cake is layered with house-made coffee ice cream, covered with a chocolate glaze. Of course, I can't forget the cinnamon, caramel and hazelnut brittle served alongside. The moistness of

the cake went well with the light coffee flavor, giving a smooth consistency with the crisp brittle adding a nice textural detail.

Food is art. With every dish there is a beauty, a creative imagery that has come to fruition. After this month's Dine, I look forward to appreciating and reveling in not only the taste, but also the beauty of all future dishes to come. 🍴



Interview by Jacklyn Tran Photos by Image Pharmacy

Chef's Corner: Tips To Beautiful Food

Let the chefs from the wonderful restaurants of the "Beautiful Cuisine" article show you some of their secrets to putting together not only a great tasting meal, but a great looking one too.



What's a good tip for someone who wants to plate food elegantly at home?

Executive Chef Bobby Moore of Barking Frog: Part of being a chef for so many years is that you learn a sense of style. You want to show off the integrity of the ingredients, have them speak for themselves. Since we're all artists, we approach the food that way. We create with a sense of beauty in our technique and seasoning. Think colors, lots of color. Be aware of the colors you're using and what's in season. Make sure, though, that it tastes good first and looks beautiful after. Taste is everything, while beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Chef-Owner Holly Smith of Café Juanita: Don't overfill the plate. Leaving an inch or two border of negative space between the food and inside rim of the plate makes food pop.

What's the last thing you should look at to ensure a plate is ready for serving?

Sous Chef Mike Kamiti of Ponti Seafood Grill: Cleanliness. Make sure the edges of the plate are clean and everything has a sheen. You want things to be centered and tight in the middle. You're not looking for perfection, but you don't want things to cascade off the plate like it's just been dropped.

Smith: Aesthetically, that the rim is wiped. Also that there is some height if possible and it looks nice from all angles.

Is there a secret to beautiful plating?

Chef Partner Don Curtiss of Volterra: I think it's something that you have or you don't. But keep in mind that less is more. The right flick of the wrist when holding the ladle is sometimes all you need. In my early days as a chef, they would yell, "Your food is not

an island unless it's soup!" So be careful not to overdo. Our style is simple; Tuscan that shows the beauty of ingredients, which is especially nice since we know the source of all our ingredients.

Kamiti: That the food comes from the heart. Also, I've learned [from Executive Chef Giles van der Bogert] that if you maintain your composure, it will show on your plate in any situation.

Smith: Light hands and for me letting the food still represent its natural form.

What's a go-to garnish you use when need something quick but pretty? Or a beautiful ingredient you often use?

Pastry Chef Kathleen Callahan of Matt's in the Market: Strawberries. They have a color that's so bright. Whether they're whole or sliced, they are very easy to work with and add a great visual dynamic.

Kamiti: Herbs are always a good garnish. Types of oils, chili basil oils, curry oils; all bring a shine and color to the plate. Colored salts and smoked salts work well too.

Curtiss: I like different baby greens, micro greens or baby celery sprouts. I like to use the natural beauty of the food. Cut the vegetables up nicely, but you don't need to play too much with them. Refrain from creating a dish because you want to use the color of an ingredient just for its color. Just don't do it. Don't contrive, because it may look good, but may taste terrible. A nice touch is an herb sprig from an herb that you're using in the dish, like rosemary or thyme.

Smith: I believe in garnishing only with edible ingredients that compliment and improve a dish. Curls of Parmigiano-Reggiano, fabulous crystals of a finishing salt

or a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil often do the trick.

What minor details of food should be considered when plating? Or can it sometimes be a challenge?

Callahan: Dealing with temperature differentiation is difficult. Try to make sure to get things on the table in time, while they're at their peak. That can be important.

Curtiss: One of the big problems is making sure plates are in sync. Make sure a hot plate is used with hot food, a cold plate with cold food. When you put cold food on top of hot you have to make sure you think about that effect. Customers expect you to think about these things in advance. For example a salsa verde on a steak may cool it down. You have to be ready to combine and serve them properly.

Smith: I think ingredients that are too piecey are hard to make look great, sliced duck breast with sliced quince for example can look messy. But if you make a mostarda or chutney you can plate it more beautifully.

Any other tips and tricks you can share for home cooks about food or the art of food?

Curtiss: Think everything through ahead of time if you're having a dinner party. Draw out your dish even. Get out everything you need and have it ready to plate. You don't want to have to run and chop something last minute while your food sits. Be fully prepared for your guests and it'll be a success.

Callahan: When it comes to plating, less is more. Like in cooking, you want ingredients to speak for themselves so you don't need to gussy it up, but rather let your centerpiece shine. 🍴