

AN INGENIOUS SUCCESS

A visit to Range most often begins with a stop at the bar, where a sexy, convivial atmosphere encourages diners to relax and embrace the languid pace of this favorite San Francisco dining locale. Here, an eclectic staff and a polished concrete bar emblazoned with glowing metal stars from old stoves hints at the kind of ingenuity Range embodies.

Written by Ashley Griffin

range





Steamed Manila Clams



Marinated Beets with Shaved Fennel



Buckwheat Crepes with Nectarines,
Roasted Cherries, and Crème Fraîche Ice Cream

Located on Valencia Street in the Mission District, Range is the perfect pairing of urban industrial style meets laid-back ambience. Inside, the inviting open bar gives way to a narrow hallway fitted with a row of tables followed immediately by a well-appointed back dining room. The rooms aren't so much fluid as they are an intriguing mix of three spaces each conveying an intimate, privileged dining experience.

Husband and wife owners Phil and Cameron West—he formerly of Bacar and Eos, she hailing from Delfina—opened Range in July 2005. They have basked in the glow of positive reviews and a packed house ever since and prove themselves well-attuned to honing the flavors and exemplary service found at Range.

Tonight, our hostess seats us in what is arguably the best

and the worst section of the house, depending on whom you ask. For some, the small smattering of tables wedged between the bar and the main dining room does not convey the stature they desire. For others, sitting here provides an opportunity to watch the staff work their magic through a wall of tiny windows aimed at Range's bustling kitchen.

And work magic they will. Phil West's compact menu represents the dishes of a chef who focuses on flavors that serve his talents well. A fluffy starter salad is quickly eaten and whisked away, while a bowl of steamed manila clams with fennel sausage requires a more leisurely pace.

The rotating dinner menu further establishes Phil West's penchant for seasonal California cuisine. Though the menu changes daily, he typically includes a variation on familiar favorites for frequent patrons. A roasted chicken dish—tonight studded with pancetta, Lucques olives, and crisp croutons—is one such dish. Paired with a tangy



Owners Phil and Cameron West



Bittersweet Chocolate-Armagnac Soufflé

lemon vinaigrette, it is immensely palate-pleasing. Among main course dishes, guests will also find meatier options like a leg of lamb as tender as it is robust and smaller servings of well-dressed fish.

Like the menu, the service at Range is straightforward and attentive in a kind of way that would impress even the shrewdest diner. On this busy Sunday evening our server hovers nearby, ready to fulfill our every request. In particular, he shares with us an aptitude for suggesting wine pairings (alas, he is a new vintner as well as a waiter at Range). We put our palates in his hands, and he does not disappoint, picking a rich, old-world red that pairs equally well with our appetizers and main course.

Enhancing the already supreme food and service is the kitchen staff's tendency to send "gifts" to our table throughout the meal. Alongside our appetizers, our server

places a plate of delightful nettle-filled ravioli that take the prize as the table's favorite starter. The second well-received gift came later in the evening and consisted of a melt-in-your-mouth Meyer lemon cake that is as pillowy as it is sweet.

The rest of the desserts are noteworthy in and of themselves, marking Range as the kind of restaurant that strives to remain consistent from start to finish. The dessert menu might feature a tangy rhubarb tart paired with spicy ginger ice cream, thin crepes with sweet huckleberries and crème fraîche ice cream, or bittersweet chocolate-Armagnac soufflé. The last is far too rich to indulge in alone; split it between the table. For the perfect end, consider enhancing your final course with a sweet or sparkling dessert wine, too, or—dare we suggest it—an indulgent espresso martini. **ISF**