

New restaurant features flawless food, service

BY PATRICIA UNTERMAN
Special to The Examiner

Six-week-old Range is one of the major restaurant happenings of the year. Everything I dream about in a restaurant experience came true here.

We were warmly met at the door and led from the bustling front bar room through a passageway with an open kitchen on one side and a few big wooden booths on the other, to a pale green, square dining room in the back, rimmed with soft brown leather banquettes, trimmed with wood and illuminated by skylights and high windows. Weighty silverware and thin, elegant glassware were insouciantly set on shiny aluminum tables. This sleek New York-style room made everyone look sexy.

A waiter came only after we had time to read the menu. She listened, answered questions knowledgeably, but didn't offer more than we wanted to know.

The food was flawless. Each bite of citrusy raw hamachi sprinkled with crunchy sea salt (\$10), with a pretty salad of melon, avocado, and cucumber, thrilled. Each mouthful of Little Gem lettuces, pecans, wedges of fresh fig and a whisper of blue cheese (\$8.75), tasted complete, a paen to California bounty.

Baked bay scallop "Diablo" (\$10), a dish that owes its soul to poor, beloved New Orleans, had a bubbling hot brown sauce that was deep, smoldering, a little mustardy and fabulous with the tiny scallops.

Coffee-rubbed pork shoulder (\$16), meltingly tender, also came in an addictive mahogany brown sauce, accompanied with soft hominy and garlicky, long-braised chard. I've had dishes like it a hundred times, but Range put its classy signature on this one.

Not just vegetarians will love



JASON STEINBERG/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

Signature dishes at Range include the coffee-rubbed pork shoulder with creamy hominy and braised greens, left, and a salad with lettuce, figs, toasted pecans and blue cheese vinaigrette.

Restaurant Review

Range

Location: 842 Valencia St., San Francisco

Contact: (415) 282-8283 or visit www.rangesf.com

Hours: Sunday through Wednesday 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday 5:30 to 11 p.m.

Price range: Appetizers \$6 to \$12; entrees \$15 to \$20; desserts \$7

Recommended dishes: Bay scallop diablo, hamachi with melon salad, little gem lettuce with figs and blue cheese, coffee-rubbed pork shoulder, barley- and mushroom-stuffed chard leaves, Brillat-Savarin soufflé with strawberry salad

Credit cards: Visa and Mastercard

Range's barley- and mushroom-stuffed chard leaves (\$16), enriched with fresh goat cheese, sauced with corn-infused cream and garnished with a fried-squash blossom — a complete meal. A thick strip of moist, wild ivory salmon (\$18),

melted into a winsome bed of corn, chanterelles and escarole, united by a light, creamy mustard sauce.

A lot of chefs these days are playing around with savory desserts, but I'm still thinking about Range's buoyant Brillat-Savarin soufflé (all

desserts \$7), paired with strawberry salad dressed with tarragon and balsamic. Brilliant!

Whether you prefer a huge Chopin vodka martini (\$8.50) or an exceptional glass of wine, Range has your beverage. The restaurant runs a top-notch bar, which is no surprise considering that the owners, chef Phil West and dining room manager-partner Cameron West met at Eos, the Cole Valley restaurant that pioneered the world-beat wine program. Phil went on to open Bacar and Cameron managed Delfina, so these two know exactly what it takes to run a restaurant. At Range, their experience and passion have come together to create a new San Francisco classic.

The new fourth edition of Patricia Unterman's "San Francisco Food Lover's Guide" is now in bookstores everywhere.