

Kitchen 1540 — Tradition Reborn

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VINCENT KNAKAL

With a stunning renovation, the timeless L'Auberge Del Mar is now home to the new Kitchen 1540 headed by executive chef and James Beard award-winner Paul McCabe.

Whether you opt for a formal dinner in the private wine room, a tasting at the chic wine bar, or

The menu leads to a discovery of flavors in which guests can decide exactly how they would like to dine. "I revised the menu 14 times to get it where it is today," says McCabe. "It was imperative to strike a balance between fine dining and approachable food, and still be creative. I think we achieved that."

says McCabe. "We call the hiramasa a sashimi, but it's really a crudo because it cures for four hours in salt, coriander, citrus, and fennel."

An extravaganza of color in two stunning salads displays a rich invention of ingredients that blend so faultlessly you'll be begging for more. Don't miss the Organic Beet Salad with Valdeon blue, pistachio brittle, caramelized yogurt, and endive, or the Persimmon Salad with pecans and elixir vinegar.

Other superb standouts include Scottish Salmon, Kurobuta Pork Shoulder, and an assortment of cured meats and cheeses. "With our meats and cheeses, you can pick from a list of what's available and build your own platter or have one item that catches your eye," explains McCabe.

When it came time for dessert, I let the chef decide. I don't know how McCabe pulled it off, but he read my mind. A big fan of anything root beer, the Root Beer Trio — a mini-float, mousse cake, and brittle — had me thinking he must have spent hours as a mad scientist inventing such a delight. When I asked him for the recipe, he just chuckled.

"I like the flexibility that the restaurant and menu offer, allowing guests to determine how they want to enjoy their meal," he offers. "It's a unique concept — there's nothing like it in North County." (858/793-6460, www.laubergedelmar.com)

MARIA DESIDERATA MONTANA



Kitchen 1540's Scottish Salmon

small plates for two at a quiet table, the luxurious setting is gorgeous and the open kitchen is eventful. "I've never been a fan of open kitchens," notes McCabe. "However, since we've opened, I've come to like it because it allows me the opportunity to have more contact with the guests."

I was impressed with the combined silkiness and extravagance of the Hiramasa Sashimi with compressed fennel and lemon jam sorrel and the Salmon Tartare with potato crème fraîche, arugula, and fried anchovy. "I think people are starting to eat more raw food and it's an outlet of creativity for me,"