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An Epic Luncheon

By Eileen Solis Rogers

Photography by Brian Wong

Executive Chef Parke Ulrich welcomed guests at EPIC Roasthouse, an acclaimed waterfront restaurant in San Francisco, with its menu offering which was officially launched last November, 2013. This was shortly after his takeover from Chef Jan Birnbaum who was at the helm of EPIC for the last 6 years and who recently announced his retirement from the kitchen. Ulrich, who has been executive chef at its sister restaurant, Waterbar, where his focus was on elegant seafood offerings, will now oversee both kitchens with the assistance of Chefs de Cuisine Justin Baade at Waterbar and Eric Hollis at EPIC Roasthouse. Clearly Ulrich is still up to the challenge of sporting his toque between two kitchens on a daily basis.

We were fortunate to sit down recently and have a sampling of Chef Ulrich's globally-inspired take on a steakhouse menu, and at the same time, marvel on EPIC's magnificent views of the San Francisco bay, Bay Bridge, Treasure Island, and the San Francisco skyline. EPIC not only can boast of its panoramic views of the bay, but of its Pat Kuleto design and architecture as well. EPIC showcases Kuleto's rendition of a pump house with its enormous open concept dining room where a giant flywheel and pulley sits at the center. The dramatic space includes a massive fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows and of course, Kuleto's signature: an exhibition kitchen. EPIC's grand ambiance is fitting for its menu which

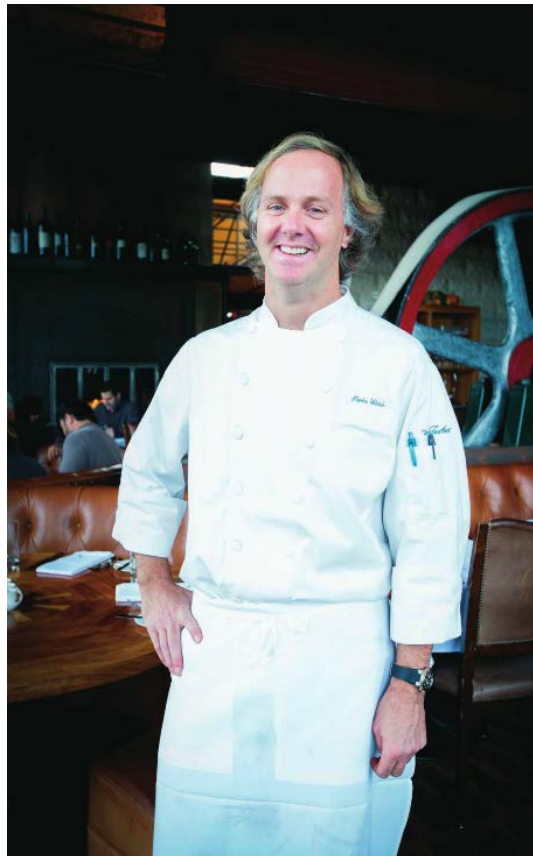


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features an inventive combination of traditional and contemporary steakhouse favorites.

A selection of house-cured charcuterie and kumamoto oysters welcomed us, along with a glass of Schmitges, Riesling, Kabinett, Germany, Mosel, Red Slate-Land & Sea 2012. The charcuterie included paper-thin slices of goat salame, duck galantine, and bacon which were presented on large white platters and each meticulously arranged alongside a compote of golden raisins.

A special 4-course tasting menu was prepared for us each including wine pairings. As we each claimed our seats overlooking the magnificence of the bay, we each shared a selection of "family-style" first course tastings which included: Butter Lettuce Salad which included wedges of butter lettuce and baby beets with a vibrant emulsion of green goddess dressing and the right touch of crispy shallots, Comice Pear Salad showcasing fall chicories, Laura Chenel



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Crottin (an award-winning goat cheese) and dressing infused with Navarro Gewurztraminer, and Sashimi of Kona Kampachi, so thinly sliced and presented with slices of persimmons and avocado, finger lime “caviar” and yuzu – this dish was as delicious as it was beautiful and the “pop” on the tongue from the finger lime pulp is like caviar releasing a citrus flavor.

We continued to enjoy our Riesling which I thought was the perfect pairing for the light tones of the first course offering. For our second course, we were each served a plate of Bone Marrow & Dungeness Crab Gratin which was topped with a white truffle glaze and Braised Pork Belly served with crispy calamari, burnt orange blossom honey and shiso. The bone marrow dish was intensely delicious as the marrow was served on the half bone of about 6-7 inches in length, roasted to perfection and topped with a generous heaping of crab gratin and white truffle glaze. Each bite had a perfect combination of gooey goodness and richness, I was at a loss for words.

The braised pork belly was equally as delicious especially when eaten with the crispy calamari, a combination that is bound to be an EPIC signature. Every bite of the second course was a stupendous mingling of land and sea! The third course was a play on Ulrich’s take on seafood: English Channel Dover Sole with artichoke hash, cipollini onions and caviar fondue and Wood Oven Roasted Swordfish with Israeli couscous, harrisa and roasted little neck clams. Both dishes exemplified Ulrich’s elegant touches when it comes to seafood. Indeed, a lighter fare and each plate included a very generous portion of freshness. The simplicity of the fish was spot-on with its wine pairing of Vallin, Viognier Blend, Santa Ynez Valley 2012. As if we didn’t have enough food at this point, but I was thrilled that the fourth course was served “family-style,” as I had planned to only take a bite from each cut of meat as I was getting too full at this point.

The fourth course showcased Ulrich’s take on a steakhouse menu: Pork “Stinco” this ham hocks with Italian roots was so tender and flavorful, one bite was not enough! Wagyu Short Ribs “A la Ficelle” (a French term for food dangling from a string in front of a fire) served with broccollini, pine nuts and house made kimchi was superb. Dry Aged New York Bone-In Steak 20 served with broccollini, pine nuts and house made kimchi was superb. Dry Aged New York Bone-In Steak 20 oz. and Cote De Boeuf 28 oz. (classic rib eye) were both carved table-side by Chefs Ulrich and Hollis.

We enjoyed 4 delicious side dishes of Spaetzle Gratin with fontina cheese, Chopped Spinach with caraway Chantilly, “Julia Child” Potatoes with gruyere cheese, and Roasted Cauliflower with golden raisins. Three house-made complements included: a classic Bernaise sauce, Horseradish, and Chimichurri (rich in a puree of cilantro and other herbs). While carving our meats, Ulrich shared that the “Julia Child” potatoes was inspired



by his mom’s recipe which was known to his family as the “Julia Child” potatoes. He also stressed that the steaks were procured by San Francisco butcher Bryan Flannery. Epic, Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley 2011 was the well thought-out pairing for the rich meats.

Wine Director Petra Polakovicova took pride in explaining that EPIC has an extensive wine list including California wines, as well as those of Europe and around the world. She added that the EPIC label they serve is a product of EPIC personnel getting together once a year and enjoy a day of fun, bottling and bonding in Yountville, California where this Epic bottle originated from. For dessert, we each had a trio of Honey Roasted Pear Cake, Apple Galette and Frozen Peanut S’more. The miniature desserts were the perfect end to a hearty four-course meal, and the warm and cold combination lent a distinctive feature. Indeed, the rockstars of EPIC including Executive Chef Ulrich, Chef de Cuisine Eric Hollis, Wine Director Petra Polakovicova, Pastry Chef Sarah Principe, Managing Partner Pete Sittnick and General Manager Lori Theis are all in on making each of EPIC’s diners’ experience remarkable. This gastronomic experience was truly epic in my book. ■

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