

DINING REVIEW

Addison has the perfect mix of ambience, energy and flavor

By **Maria C. Hunt**

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Diners are a big part of what makes a restaurant tick.

Obviously, there's an economic reason chefs need customers. But less obvious is the importance of the unspoken artistic exchange between chefs and diners. Chefs labor unseen in hot kitchens, creating delicious dishes, fueled by the promise of diners taking that first satisfied bite.

As a diner, I like being in a room filled with people, too. It confirms that there are others who think this chef and restaurant are worth their time. And one of the joys of dining is people-watching, sizing up other tables and imagining how the diners came to be there.

In the first few visits to Addison, the opulent fine-dining restaurant at the aptly named Grand Del Mar, the energy that comes from a lively restaurant was missing.

The restaurant and resort, inspired by the work of Florida resort designer Addison Mizner, offer a sense of drama with high ceilings and lush decor. The impression starts when you turn into the large curving drive and then step into the parlor framed by windows covered in purplish taffeta drapes tied back with golden tassels.

Settle into winged-back armchairs done in burnout velvet, order a cocktail and gaze at the fire or admire the detail in the Moorish-feeling inlaid ceiling.

When a room like this isn't full, it feels like you have to be on your best behavior so as not to disturb the hush that lingers over the large space filled with exquisite china, Riedel stemware and \$1,000 bottles of wine.

Early on, it felt like chef William Bradley and his staff weren't quite in sync either. Although I tasted creative combinations such as the roasted poularde on gingerbread with a pistachio puree, I had no idea where the dish came from other than the chef's imagination. And though wine service has been stellar since day one, the waiters moved through the room hesitantly.



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The fireplace near the bar at Addison in the Grand Del Mar adds warmth to the luxurious setting.

But in two recent visits, it was clear that Bradley and Addison have come into their own. The dining room was filled with life and the sounds of people having a good time, and the waiters are polished. The diverse crowd included a gray-haired couple having a quiet meal, a couple on a date, two large tables filled with young women on girls' night out, a party next door lingering over wine as they conversed in Spanish.

Addison has evolved into a warm place serving French-inspired cuisine that's boldly flavored and stunning. Bradley is a precise young chef whose career began at the Loews Coronado Bay Resort under James Boyce. Bradley's menu at Addison is built on fine ingredients that are thoughtfully treated to use each to its best advantage.

Bradley is quite the technician and the artist, but there's a sensual aspect to each of his dishes, too, so the final appeal is an earthy one.

Even Bradley's quote on the front of the menu has evolved from the curious ("To create is to cook. To cook is to create.") to the affirmative ("Savor these moments.")

Recent meals began with an amuse bouche of brilliant red gazpacho covered in tarragon mayonnaise. A few moments later, warm herbed gougères arrived, begging for a glass of champagne.

Addison has a world-class cellar filled with 21,000 bottles assembled by sommelier Jesse Rodriguez, a French Laundry alum. Rodriguez, now assisted by Dan Pilkey, formerly of Nine-Ten, includes all the famous names from Bordeaux, Burgundy, Italy and California, but it's so much more entertaining and enlightening to put yourself in the sommeliers' hands and let them dazzle you with wines you've never dreamed of.

I've tasted a De Trafford straw wine from South Africa's Stellenbosch, a Coldstream Hills pinot noir from Australia's Yarra Valley, and Hiedler grüner veltliner served in Riedel's new green-stemmed glass made just for that grape.

Intriguing options

The compact menu is filled with intriguing choices. Take the foie gras, which has to be worth the guilt these days. Bradley grills it over a fire, imbuing the lump of fat with sharp smoky notes. Along with smoked almonds and poached apricots scented with white elder flowers, it creates an enthralling dish with nutty charred and sweet flavors.



DON KOHLBAUER / Union-Tribune
The grilled foie gras at Addison is served with smoked almonds and poached apricots scented with white elder flowers.

A fleshy and naturally briny langoustine comes draped in a smooth red Thai curry sauce, accented by a hint of spice and a smattering of toasted coconut and cashews.

The silky corn soup, graced with fragrant wild honey and a slurry of rosemary cream, sweetly captures a last vestige of summer. Bradley says the soup and several other dishes will change soon, as the menu takes on richer flavors for autumn.

Bradley takes the rustic French dish Artichokes Barigoule and refines it into a clever and stylish signature. Artichoke hearts turned into circles are mounded with black-olive tapenade that has a mysteriously earthy, salty and sweet flavor. Served in a thin pool of parsley sauce and garnished with a tiny basil leaf, the whole assembly resembles an acorn.

The risottos at Addison are ultra decadent and suave with slightly toothsome rice. The most recent, served in a squat double-handled bowl, pairs sharp aged Winchester Gouda with parsley sauce.

That fresh herb made a vividly flavored cap for a tender piece of lamb loin paired with a juicy lamb crepinette. A buttery tart filled with goat cheese and figs and a pool of cucumber yogurt sauce offered creative contrasts for the lamb.

Succulent Atlantic salmon is well paired with golden Sultana raisins and an extravagant sauce made with vinegar and verjus that tames the salmon's richness. Bradley makes a nod at the classic Sole Meunier with his dish of poached sole served in satiny broth fragrant with lemon. Tender leaves of savoy cabbage and meaty chanterelle mushrooms add complexity.

Nearly all these dishes shared a sweet flavor profile, something that could get monotonous. And after entrees with so many sweet notes, it's hard to appreciate dessert.

None of the desserts I've tasted in recent visits inspired more than a few bites. A "napoleon" of crisp puff pastry stuffed with dried cherries was topped with a dollop of lemon sorbet. The whole dessert sat in a pool of tart creamy sauce, which did little for the other two elements. An upscale custard pie, served with caramel ice cream, had a good flavor but a firm texture for custard. And the sweet milk mousse with a vanilla tuile was actually salty.

A wiser course is selecting from the cheeses, like Tillston Point Blue or Ewephoria, accompanied by toasted bread, Marcona almonds, honey comb or dried fruit and a glass of dessert wine.

Addison is truly a destination restaurant, tucked away in the hills east of Carmel Valley. But it's also one of those San Diego gems that's worth the trip.



DON KOHLBAUER / Union-Tribune
Addison chef William Bradley