



FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY ABE OPINCAR

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY K. FELLOWS



FROM LEFT: Addison's opulent dining room; King crab with grilled lime, braised romaine and chive flowers

THE PROMISED GRAND *The new Addison at The Grand Del Mar is proving its status as a serious dining destination—and it's cause célèbre for S.D.*

The odds were against Addison. A Santa Ana had been blowing all day. My sinuses throbbed. My eyes ached so intensely that my irises pinwheeled. My computer was on the fritz. The manufacturer's shame-based "customer service" staff showed me no mercy. The world seemed a place of little glamour and even less ease. Then my friend Leslie called.

"Why don't we have dinner at Addison?" she asked. "You said you wanted to go."

By the time we drove out to Addison's home, the new resort The Grand Del Mar, the sun was setting. The air was cool and smelled of wild anise, white sage and freshly mown grass. Addison's hostess, a leggy brunette, met us beneath the restaurant's immense porte-cochere and led us through breezy, high-ceilinged, marble-floored rooms to a table overlooking the golf course.

A few minutes after I was seated, a waiter set before me a square plate with a shallow, round well filled with tzatziki, the Greek appetizer. I'd call the dish playful if I were the sort of person who used words like that to describe food and wine, but I've always thought that sort of language made chefs and winemakers sound like precocious children. Although chef William Bradley is very young, he's no child.

What his kitchen sent to my table looked like a miniature work of art, something inspired by Miró. A halo of pungent olive oil floating on the yogurt's surface surrounded Champagne grapes and minute spheres of crisp cucumber.

"This is too pretty to eat," said Leslie. But we did eat it, and while we cooed over its delicacy, sommelier Jesse Rodriguez, whom Addison nabbed from French Laundry, appeared tableside.

"I just wanted you to try something wonderful," he said, pouring us splashes of a crisp, very light white Basque wine, which he identified as little-known and hard-to-find.

"It's a Txomin Extaniz," he said, "made from Txazoli grapes."

While I don't remember how Rodriguez pronounced those Basque names (who could?), what I do remember is that his unobtrusive enthusiasm typified the service we enjoyed throughout our meal. And I think this enthusiasm is key to understanding chef Bradley's cooking. He's not interested in imposing some newfangled culinary doctrine on his guests. He's inspired by serious pleasure. His French-style exactitude is infused with full-blooded Mediterranean color and vitality.

He takes, for example, a small, round portion CONTINUED...

...CONTINUED of steak tartare, crowns it with a soft-poached egg, and bathes it all in a few spoonfuls of Gouda fondue. These are luxurious, smooth textures, and luxurious, smooth tastes. He even takes something as simple as perfectly tender baby octopus and blankets it with translucent ribbons of chorizo and delicate tracings of chorizo-flavored crème fraîche. This balance of earthiness and skill is what we mean by the word *sensual*.

Bradley's precision, his avid attention to detail, manifests itself in the absolute freshness of his seafood and in the perfect doneness of his pork and beef. The prawns that he poaches in butter are firm and sweet. The chunk of King crab he nestles against a wedge of grilled lime is juicy and sweet and firm. The fragrant lamb loin he juxtaposes against a healthy wedge of North African spiced lamb sausage is pale red at center and fork-tender.

About that lamb loin. Beside it on the plate, Bradley offers a warm wedge of goat cheese tart that he's decorated with slivers of pickled plum. The flavors work incredibly well together because Bradley's fluency in Mediterranean cuisine is absolute. The musky, mineral taste of the goat cheese plays in an interesting and entirely pleasing way against the lamb's dark flavor and aroma, and the tart sour plum, a bright, inspired note, cuts through it all.

WHAT HIS KITCHEN SENT TO MY TABLE LOOKED LIKE...SOMETHING INSPIRED BY MIRÓ. A HALO OF PUNGENT OLIVE OIL FLOATING ON THE YOGURT'S SURFACE SURROUNDED CHAMPAGNE GRAPES AND MINUTE SPHERES OF CRISP CUCUMBER.

What underscores, or heightens, the wise sensuality of Bradley's cooking is the atmosphere in which it's served. Addison has a Moorish-by-way-of-Miami feel, a sort of lavishness of materials and appointments that stops just short of being over-the-top. It comes across as a sense of generosity and ease. You feel relaxed, hopeful, as if everything were all right with the world.

"I sold the paper for thirty-five million," said a young man to his friends at the table next to us. "If I'd held out, I probably could have gotten forty-five or fifty."

"I wonder if he's single," said Leslie. "He looks single. Or like he's about to be single."

As I said, Addison inspires hopefulness. When you're forking into tender shreds of jerked pork that Bradley has swaddled in feathery prosciutto, you really are reminded that the world isn't all Santa Ana winds and migraines and frightful international news. When Bradley serves you a small wedge of fleur-de-teche, an unctuous, aromatic triple-cream cheese that he tracked down in Louisiana, you're aware that pleasure is just as real as all the things that otherwise trouble and distract you. Bradley sincerely wants you to feel good.

As does Jesse Rodriguez, who has to be among the most charming sommeliers this side of the Mississippi. Whether he was offering us tastes of Tor Syrah or a rare Muscat from Australia, he waited quietly by the table until he saw us smile, and as soon as we did, he disappeared. Like all of Addison's staff, Rodriguez did everything possible to enhance our meal without ever stopping our flow of conversation.

We were still talking about the baby octopus and the steak tartare at the end of the evening. Of our desserts, I remember a silky gelato made with olive oil that accompanied a crumbly little butter-rich cake. I remember the taste of salted pecans paired with butterscotch ice cream. They were as direct and satisfying as Bradley's appetizers and entrées. It's a testament to Bradley's kitchen that it can hold a guest's complete attention over the course of an almost three-hour meal.

When I glanced at my watch, I was amazed by how long we'd been at our table. We called for the check and had our coffee outside, amid the cool, soft breeze on the restaurant's west patio. Our waiter brought us little homemade chocolates and little jellies perfumed with passion fruit. The day had started with so little promise. Chef Bradley's cooking and Addison's staff lifted me out of my bad humor. They reminded me that life is, in fact, quite manageable, and rather reliably punctuated by a certain measure of ease and happiness. Which is the sort of accomplishment you can reasonably expect of the finest restaurants. **R**

ADDISON: 5200 GRAND DEL MAR WY., SAN DIEGO, 858.314.1900 **HOURS:** WED.-THURS., SUN. 5-10PM; FRI.-SAT. 5-11PM **DRESS:** DRESSY. HAVE FUN, BUT CHEF BRADLEY'S COOKING DESERVES RESPECT **WHERE TO SIT:** NEAR THE FIREPLACE IN CHILLY WEATHER, OR AT ONE OF THE GOLF-COURSE-FACING TABLES FOR SUNSET DINNERS **ABOUT THE RISOTTO:** SIMPLY PUT, BRADLEY IS A MASTER **WINE LIST:** EXTENSIVE, INTELLIGENTLY ECLECTIC, MODERATELY PRICED TO SKY'S-THE-LIMIT **NOISE:** QUIET PUNCTUATED BY DELIGHTED GASPS AT THE FOOD **PARKING:** SUAVE, EFFICIENT VALET **RATING:** ★★★★★

What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.



Caption

Chef William Bradley