

The Gossiping Gourmet: Three-Seventy's menu is packed with flavor



The pork belly with arugula, pistachio, citrus vinaigrette at Three-Seventy Common Kitchen + Drink in Laguna Beach. (SCOTT SMELTZER, HB Independent / January 10, 2012)



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Three-Seventy Common Kitchen + Drink is a wonderful new addition to the Orange County dining scene. Well, not entirely new because it is in the former home of Sorrento Grille. New owner, Executive Chef Ryan Adams, and his Chef de Cuisine Mitch Gillam are both Sorrento Grille alumni.

The space has been attractively redecorated and the menu is entirely their own, featuring "kicked up comfort food" with tons of flavor at reasonable prices. The menu is divided into five categories: bites, small, medium, large and sides. This gives you the opportunity to put together some snacks with drinks, or a lovely dinner. Whatever you choose, the flavors will be distinctive and delicious.

Nibble on a juicy Thai-style chicken wing with a fruity, sweet hot glaze or an order of shishito poppers filled with goat cheese and cheddar, fried in a delicate batter, that is both light and crunchy.

If your arteries can stand it, don't miss the bone marrow.

The salty, fatty, luscious goodness makes it worth the risk. A roasted beef bone is sliced in half lengthwise making it easy to scoop up the yummy stuff. Dab on some chimichurri sauce, smear it on the grilled bread and balance the richness with a little red onion, radish and parsley salad.

Speaking of indulgences, their pork belly is as tasty as any around; cooked to a tender softness, perfectly seasoned, it just melts in your mouth. In this case the contrast is provided by an arugula and pistachio salad with a punchy citrus vinaigrette.

Last but not least on this list of rich delights is their duck liver offering. Once again, it is one of the best we've had anywhere this side of the Atlantic.

The perfectly seared, buttery, duck liver was set on a huckleberry pancake and garnished with a slice of meaty, crunchy bacon, a little huckleberry confit and a touch of maple syrup. It was a symphony of sweet and salty notes. (A word to our readers ... we did not feast on all three dishes in a single evening, nor do we recommend that you do, but that's one of many good reasons to return to Three-Seventy.)

Mussels come Belgian-style, topped with a mound of crispy fries. The mussels were small, plump, tender and sweet. They rested in a slightly creamy broth, accented with lemon, leeks and garlic. We used the shells to scoop up the savory broth. The excellent fries didn't even need the mild aioli that accompanied them.

We are always happy to see black cod on the menu and this one was excellent.

The pristine fish glistened with moisture, while the thin layer of skin crackled. This is how fish should be cooked!

Enhancing its flavor was a delicious potpourri of green lentils, red onion, and salty bits of chorizo, all made piquant with lemon. The juices mingled on the plate to make a delicate sauce for the fish. A refreshing little salad of parsley and paper-thin slices of radish was the perfect final touch.

Wild mushrooms make a mouth-watering side dish. A mélange of specially selected mushrooms are roasted with garlic and herbs. We would even order them as a separate course to enjoy their full flavored earthy goodness.

Desserts are homey comfort food including: Chef Ryan's Grandma B's Chocolate Cake with Love, chocolate banana bread pudding, apple fried pies; and Presley, Elvis' favorite: cinnamon toast, peanut butter, ice cream and honey.

A special feature at Three-Seventy is their Sunday Night Social, supper served family style with entrées like bacon wrapped meatloaf with mashed potatoes and wild mushroom gravy or good old-fashioned fried chicken.

Tuesday night is brown bag night. Order dinner and get a mystery bottle of wine for \$15. Wednesday evening features a three-course chef's choice menu with wine pairing for \$30.

Nightly crowds mean the noise level is still high, but they are working on it.

Kudos to these talented chefs who have managed to turn out excellent food at moderate prices.