



ROGUE CHEFS



Nouvelle Comfort Food: The Beet Generation

by Violetta Dei'Contorni

"It's like...a work of art...but it also tastes delicious, like someone was really paying attention, orchestrating the flavors."

"Yes" said my equally-satisfied dining companion. "It's like...you know, Nouvelle Comfort Food."

She'd nailed it. That was exactly what it was. I was dreading knocking back another disappointing, bland Stacked Food Extravaganza, and this was precisely NOT what Rogue Chefs was. It was different. Like everything had been newly conceptualized not only from the plate upwards, but from the back door to the table.

We oriented ourselves in their beautiful new digs, ordered the special wine-tasting sampler, sat back and sharpened our palettes.

Rogue Chefs is part of an expanding culinary movement in the food service business that supports what is increasingly being referred to as a "sustainable lifestyle." Think seasonally-appropriate, local, organic hand-picked fruits and vegetables — from the neighborhood if possible (and in Half Moon Bay, that's very possible) — in concert with hormone-free and antibiotic-free meats, and seafood from local fishermen. Heirloom varieties of produce are nurtured back into the food supply, and food that is locally grown is always favored over food that requires petroleum products to show up on your table. Cumbersome packaging is also no longer necessary, and the food industry's tendency to breed crops for easy shipping and storage rather than flavor and texture is eschewed. This is all good news, and the good news is Rogue Chefs does it beautifully.

In addition, Rogue Chefs has re-conceptualized the

whole idea of a restaurant; this isn't just a restaurant; it's a "culinary." According to founder Kevin Koebel, the Rogue Chefs seed was planted in his head while enjoying farmer-to-farmtable home cooking in his native British Columbia. This seed kept germinating throughout a successful international chef's career in North America and Europe, where he repeatedly was dismayed by the widening gap between fresh, just-plucked treasures from the orchard or garden and star-counting restaurant patrons. According to their website:

"The Rogue Chefs Culinary is a place where chefs can cook with fresh product [pulled] directly from the dirt for the person standing right in front of them. There are no buffers. There are no recipes. There are only classically trained chefs who use their five senses every day with ... passion and inspiration..."

The night we were there, Kevin was cooking. He came out to answer our questions about the food; I could tell my dinner was safe in his hands, and he and the rest of the staff had good listening skills and took a real interest in our suggestions. The dining room, at [address here], is gleaming and new, and in a separate location from their mouthwatering take-out counter down the street. In the dining room, the physical and psychological wall between kitchen and dining room is broken; Kevin cooked for us in plain view, as if on a stage, with a keen willingness to share his love of ingredients and artful presentation. This theatricality only made more true what Shakespeare said: all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely chefs. Or something like that.

But back to our sumptuous dinner. I always enjoy

...continued on page 31



the experience of tasting familiar foods in a new context. For example, the general paucity of good British restaurants encouraged me years ago to seek out their excellent health-food establishments. With their original interpretations of, say, salads, these places were years ahead of American sprout-and-lentil joints. A chilly land that had only recently become able to depend on a full spectrum of fresh international produce was having a quiet food revolution, setting the stage for unusual but heady combinations: a salad of radishes, walnuts and chickpeas; a "beetroot" mélange with tangerines and pinto beans. These eateries, often tucked away in odd corners of museums and dead-end cobblestone streets, were not bogged down by our generations of customary American vegetable combinations (coleslaw, carrot and raisin salad, three-bean salad). The witty Brits applied themselves to their expanded palette with the playfulness of a kid with a new box of crayons. I adore a good fresh coleslaw, but there were times when eating a "Beetroot Salad" at the overcrowded, subterranean Food for Thought in Neal's Yard was positively exhilarating.

Which is where I am going with the Marinated Local Beet Salad at Rogue Chefs. The warm, bright aroma and flavor of the locally-grown beets just leapt out at us. The accompanying celeriac-mint coulis, or fruit purée, was carefully chosen for its contrasting coolness, soft texture and contribution to the complementary color scheme of the canvas (in this case, a square white plate). We also ordered the Crisp Seared Ahi Sticks. The rare, lightly pan-seared ahi — a favorite dish of my companion — was also a knockout, even for a seasoned pan-seared ahi con-

noisseur. Lightly battered and fried rolls of seaweed wrapped around toothsome tuna tidbits are bias-cut and displayed artfully on a plate of perky, clover-like frisée greens — but this dish is more than just a pretty plate. It offers up such sparkling-clean chords of flavor — think the first few chords of, say, Pinball Wizard the first time you heard them — we didn't know whether to ogle the presentation, listen to what our awakened taste buds were telling us, or take pictures. We did all three.



Beet Salad.

Although there are no "recipes" per se, there are guidelines, of course, so that the food does come out looking and tasting like the food described on the menu, and of course the ingredients list needs to be consistent with its billing. I wanted to order everything on the menu, of course, but I had to control myself and just go with one more appetizer. The words "Portobello" and "Napoleon" appeared together on this menu for the first time in my vast reading history, so I decided to have them bring it on. To be honest, I'll order anything that involves the name of any petite French dictator: appetizer, dessert, whatever. This was my least favorite of the three, but only because it was on the small side, and I wanted more. (Next time I'm getting the Truffle Flan).

So I was delighted with the main course: Pan-Seared Australian Beef Filet Mignon Medallions with Truffle Risotto and Spinach. Local is best, of course, but it's also good to throw in a bit of the exotic. Frankly, the fact that Rogue Chefs isn't too terribly politically correct is part of its charm. It was a hearty plateful, and it tasted spectacular. It was Vertical Food, all right, but each story stood up on its own, especially the deeply-flavored greens, sandwiched between the meat and the risotto. Each layer contributed to the layer beneath it so there was more than just "presentation" going on here, there was richness of content.

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We also enjoyed a similar dish made with chicken and herbs, which would be a welcome alternate choice for those not wishing to be too politically incorrect. There are also vegetarian and seafood choices available on the menu, which reads as lyrically as a love poem from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood*.

We were sharing, Chinese-food-style, and my companion was intending to bring some of our leftovers to her significant other, but that was becoming increasingly less likely. Reluctantly, I allowed them to take the entrées away, only to have them replaced by a large, lavender-infused Crème Brûlée with two spoons, reassuring her that I was finally finished. In my book, there's always room for anything-infused Crème Brûlée.

Rogue Chefs' crew are chefs and other restaurant personnel who have come there on a quest to reconnect the earth, the food, the five senses, the people and the community. You can dine at Rogue Chefs' restaurant and wine bar Tuesday through Sunday and enjoy lunch there on Saturday. In addition to having

restaurant hours, Rogue Chefs provide private food services to peoples' homes, especially those who are too busy to cook every night. They also host wine tastings, and, of course, cater special events.



Ahi,

15 or less people and enjoy direct interaction with the chef. These meals also offer wine pairing from different regions, including information about wine makers and farmers. They also bring in chefs from different parts of the globe for special evenings that spotlight various cultural dining experiences. For more information or to sign up for one of these events, please phone 650.712.2000 or visit their comprehensive, well-designed and easy-to-navigate website at <http://www.roguechefs.com>.

Rogue Chefs Restaurant & Wine Bar

- Offering Innovative Menus Using Fresh/Organic, Local Ingredients
- Dinner Service Wednesday-Sunday / Saturday Lunch
- Chefs Table Dining Friday & Saturday Nights
- Wine Bar Offering A Diverse Selection Of Wines
- Seasonal Take Away Menu

Visit our website for our monthly menu and more!
www.RogueChefs.com

Call for Reservations
650.712.2000


ROGUE CHEFS
RESTAURANT

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