



dining

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STUNNING NEW ADDITION, SAME MASTER CHEF



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If you haven't been to Black Butte Ranch recently, you're in for a surprise. A new, spectacular building that's so modern it doesn't have a single right angle has been constructed on the edge of Phalarope Lake, offering in-your-face views of the Cascades.

My dining companion and I didn't get a chance to sample the Lakeside Bistro, which cranked out some 1,600 pizzas a month this summer and which also serves salads, lamb French dips, Wagyu Reubens, burgers and breakfast. But with Chef Dean Ecker in charge as the resort's food and beverage manager, I know I'll enjoy the food.

The culinary mastery of Chef Dean, who worked for years with celebrity Chef Michael Chiarello in both Florida and Napa, was perfectly evident over dinner in the Lodge Restaurant. After cocktails in the upstairs Aspen Lounge, which makes me feel like I'm in a crow's nest, we headed to our window-side table with a view of the lake and horses grazing in the meadow beyond.

We started with the garbanzo-cruste calamari served with a citrusy aioli sauce. Instead of the traditional crispy calamari that too often winds up being rubbery, this calamari was tender inside and out. Even better, it had been tossed with arugula, spinach, quinoa and lemon, which lightened up the dish and made it even more flavorful.

A ridiculously good and ridiculously large Radicchio Caesar followed. The contrasting colors and tastes of the bitter pink-red leaves of the radicchio and the sweet green romaine provided a downright successful spin on the classic. I loved the creamy garlic and anchovy dressing, and who can argue with lots of freshly grated parmesan cheese and homemade croutons.

"Is this the usual size?" my friend and I asked about halfway through the tasty appetizer, which could have easily been split four ways.

We wanted to eat it all. We just couldn't if we wanted to save room for our entrees. Good thing because they were even more impressive.

The 14-ounce Cedar Farms ribeye was as delicious as it was tender. Seasoned with salt and pepper, and then dotted with a pad of herbed truffle butter, the locally-sourced steak just couldn't have been better.

Ditto for the fat, silky and beautifully-seared piece of Chilean Sea Bass in coconut green curry, served with basmati rice, edamame, red pepper, shiitake mushrooms and roasted cashews. The exquisitely composed dish melded the sweetness of the fish with the faintly sweet zing of the curry, without overpowering either.

"This green curry is as good as anything I've had in Thailand, and that's saying a lot," my dinner companion announced.

We sampled (read: wolfed down) the roasted Brussel sprouts. I was a little nervous about the side dish's bacon apple jam component, but I shouldn't have worried. The small, al dente Brussel sprouts played with both smokiness and sweetness while still retaining their own flavor.

We rounded out the evening with a slice of Sourdough Chocolate Cake served with vanilla bean ice cream. I have to confess that I found the cake a tad dry and would probably opt for the peach cheesecake or Oregon berry crisp next time. A small detail in an otherwise stellar meal. Note to self: a great place to celebrate the holidays. Four thumbs up!