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February 4, 2010

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION WITH DINING EDITOR MARY BROWN MALOUF

02/03/10

On the Table

04:22 PM

First report:: Talisker on Main

BY MARY BROWN MALOUF

02/03/10 - 04:22 PM



No random boulders. No mammoth logs. No wrought-iron pine trees or Indian-inspired textiles. No BROWN.

How could this be a restaurant in Park City?

It's light, bright, white and elegant. There are no antlers anywhere, but there is a crystal chandelier hanging over the marble counter that separates the cozy dining room from the performance kitchen. The ceiling is shiny pressed tin tile, the comfy chairseats are covered in sheepskin. The whole place has a 19th-century vibe, which tends to be part of the standard issue Park City ambience but it's not the usual rough-and-ready mountain-man rusticity. Talisker on Main is sophisticated and cheerfully romantic.

The only public business owned by the luxury real estate giant Talisker, the restaurant proves the luxury of small and provides a venue for chef John Murcko whose light has been kept under a barrel since he parted with Bill White all those years ago.

He's having fun—at least, he was last night when he invited us for a chef's-whim tasting dinner.

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It turned out to be a lengthy whim—nine courses—but each one was a composition of concentrated flavors in serving sizes that allowed us to enjoy it all: seared and pounded buffalo carpaccio with a Beehive Barely Buzzed tuile and a spot of polenta; a cube of pork belly with blood orange supremes; warm Brussels sprouts leaves with pomegranate seeds, a poached apple with crisp apple sticks, crushed almonds and blue cheese could have been a dessert, minus the arugula that made it a salad; a garnet jewel of a beet with Shepherd's chevre vinaigrette; sliced rare steak served in a gruyere fondue pool with tender baguette toasts; loup de mer; chocolate tart.

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There's some chestnut foam here and some deconstruction there, but for the most part Murcko dispenses with the smoke and mirrors of molecular blah-blah-blah, serving meticulously honest flavors in a dining room that feels like his own.

Wines were perfectly paired with each course—a Susana Balbo Malbec Rose from Mendoza, Argentina with the carpaccio, a sublime Chambers-Rosewood Muscat from Rutherglen that totally eclipsed its dessert companion, a crystalline Lioco chardonnay with the fish.

And there's more to look forward to. Soon, regulars will be able to rent wine lockers and keep their own selections on hand. When the weather turns, the deep, Louisiana-style patio will be a haven.

There is a touch of crass, too—the walls are lined with stagey shots of regular ultra-rich people having ultra-exclusive fun and you suppose the intimate "invitation only" lounge upstairs was designed with closing real estate deals in mind. But lots of dining rooms are sustained by other businesses—hotels, catering operations, weddings. Talisker on Main's foundation is real estate.

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I'm excited. Park City dining has been in the doldrums for a year or so and I hope Murcko's freshness will be a wake-up call for complacent chefs. 900 Main St., Park City, 435-608-1300

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