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Talisker on Main

Not-So-New Kid in Town: After a private 20 years, chef John Murcko comes to the people.

By [Ted Scheffler](#)

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For way too long, the [Talisker](#) experience has been limited to a few very wealthy homeowners and their

guests—folks who can afford to live and play in places like the exclusive mountaintop neighborhood of Red Cloud in Park City, the Empire Pass village at Deer Valley and the Tuhaye golf course. Membership has its privileges, and one of them is being able to enjoy the outstanding gastronomy that Talisker offers.



Well, with the recent opening of Talisker on Main in Park City, Talisker finally has a public face. Talisker on Main is open to the general public—and, maybe surprisingly, it's not even Park City's most expensive restaurant. It does, however, sport one of Utah's best chefs.

If you arrive early for dinner at Talisker on Main, or choose to have a cocktail prior to dining, you'll be ushered upstairs into the "library," which sports a big fireplace, flat-screen TV, birch wood ottomans, comfy chairs and sofas and a private table for intimate dining. But downstairs is where the action is. The cozy, 42-seat restaurant features an open exhibition kitchen and has a lively, bistro-brasserie look and feel. Coming from the Talisker group, I'd expected something more posh, even intimidating. But Talisker on Main is warm and welcoming—a vibrant, fun place to nosh.

You might be tempted simply to make a meal of the starters. There are a lot of appealing options, and portion sizes aren't skimpy; they are built for sharing. So, kick things off with Winter Point oysters (\$13), which come with double-smoked bacon mignonette and lemon oil, topped with

delicate micro-greens. A knockout appetizer is a seemingly unusual combo: braised pork belly with rare seared tuna, accompanied by vivid blood orange pieces, baby beets and local Shepherd's chevre (\$13). Tuna and pork belly together? Trust me: This is a marriage that works.

I love hush puppies, and thought they were pretty hard to improve. Well, at Talisker on Main, executive chef John Murcko serves up lobster hush puppies with tarragon butter (\$15), which tastes as brilliant as it sounds. Lobster lovers might also indulge in Murcko's sensational lobster chowder (\$11) with sorrel oil, sourdough croutons and floating lobster claw. And, one more don't-miss starter is the buffalo tenderloin carpaccio (\$13), sprinkled with Espelette chili pepper and with chestnut foam, Beehive Cheese "Barely Buzzed" cheddar and polenta. I could live on this dish.

Frankly, I've been knocked out by Murcko's culinary abilities for quite some time. Most recently, I enjoyed his cooking at Talisker's Tuhaye Table Café, but didn't write about it because it's a members-only eatery. We're lucky the Michigan-born Murcko landed in Utah when his car broke down in Park City and he decided to stay. Prior to taking over the food and beverage reins for Talisker, Murcko spent 15 years working with restaurateur and chef Bill White, helping to open Grappa and serving as director of operations for Chimayo, Windy Ridge Bakery & Café, Wahso and Ghidotti's. Now, at Talisker on Main, Murcko really gets to strut his stuff—and for diners, that's a glorious thing. I don't know that there is a more talented chef in our state and, with more than 20 years of professional culinary experience under his belt, Murcko is currently at the top of his game.

Not that he does it alone. Talisker on Main is also lucky to employ the talents of chef de cuisine Briar Handy, a New England Culinary Institute graduate who most recently helped open Spruce restaurant in Park City. Together, they are a formidable team, and watching them work their magic in the open kitchen is just part of the fun of dining at this restaurant.

More fun comes via Sean Marron, the articulate general manager and sommelier. Formerly in charge of the wine program at the prestigious Phoenician resort in Scottsdale, which he helped open in 1988, Marron's food and wine knowledge is vast, and his wine pairings are spot-on. I'd never have thought to pair Pascal Jolivet Pouilly-Fume, for example, with Murcko's killer Brussels sprouts salad, which incorporates Jerez vinegar, fried shallots, pomegranate, pancetta and hazelnuts. In fact, I'd probably have thrown up my hands and ordered a PBR with my sprouts. He also turned me on to a very reasonably priced (\$36) bottle of Val de Sil Godello Valdeorras, a versatile white that worked well with Icelandic Arctic char (\$31) as well as delicious, crispy buttermilk-fried chicken with airy homemade biscuits (\$28). Marron has such deep wine knowledge, and understands so well how wine works with food, that I recommend completely surrendering to his wine suggestions. You'll be happy you did.

As with everything else here, the service, too, is impeccable. The staff is decked out in fashionable outfits (I hesitate to call them "uniforms") with knee-high Steve Madden boots, and clothing by DKNY and Ralph Lauren. No black pants and white shirts at Talisker! From attentive bussers to top-notch servers like Dani and managers such as the lovely Haven, you receive that famous Talisker-style pampered service at prices that, while not exactly cheap, doesn't require immense wealth, either.

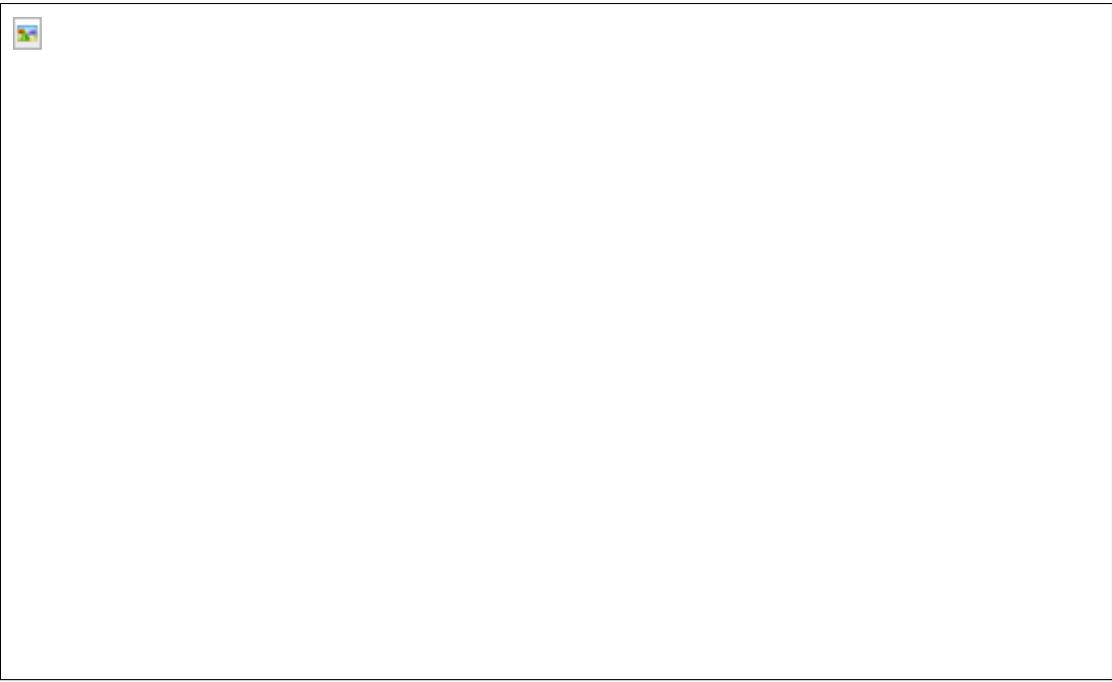
Another appealing dining option is the chef's tasting (\$52), which changes regularly but usually features three chef-selected courses (soup/starter/entrée) plus a dessert finale. However, with Murcko at the helm, every meal at Talisker on Main—no matter how big or small—is a joyous discovery of effervescent flavors and creative culinary combinations. The not-so-new kid in town has hit his stride.

TALISKER ON MAIN

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