

Feast On Urban Kitchen Grill & Wine Bar's Suburban Splendor

Head for this indie among Foothill Ranch's land of chains

By **Edwin Goei** Thursday, Aug 23 2012

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There are still some of us in OC who can't locate **Foothill Ranch** on a map, or we think there's nothing there besides row after row of squat office parks, faceless warehouses and cookie-cutter tract homes. It's the model of modern suburbia, the section of Orange County where everything is so new that what's not part of a national chain is part of a local one. This is why California Fish Grill and **Chick-fil-A** are two of the top five restaurants recommended by its own Yelpers.

Enter Urban Kitchen Grill & Wine Bar, an eatery with a title that's aspiring and also a little ironic, such as naming a pocket dog Cujo. It isn't even in the center of town, where all the other restaurants are, instead standing in what passes for the boonies, wedged between the umpteenth Wahoo's Fish Taco and the millionth **Starbucks** in one of those one-off business islands built to serve the surrounding offices, which, in this case, includes an aluminum company and some sort of electronics firm. To say that Foothill Ranch needs a place akin to Urban Kitchen isn't exaggerating at all—a co-worker of mine who lives there still swears by **Outback Steakhouse**. So it's reassuring to have walked into Urban Kitchen on a recent Saturday night to encounter a 10-minute wait for a table, with a crowd that I can safely assume constituted locals.

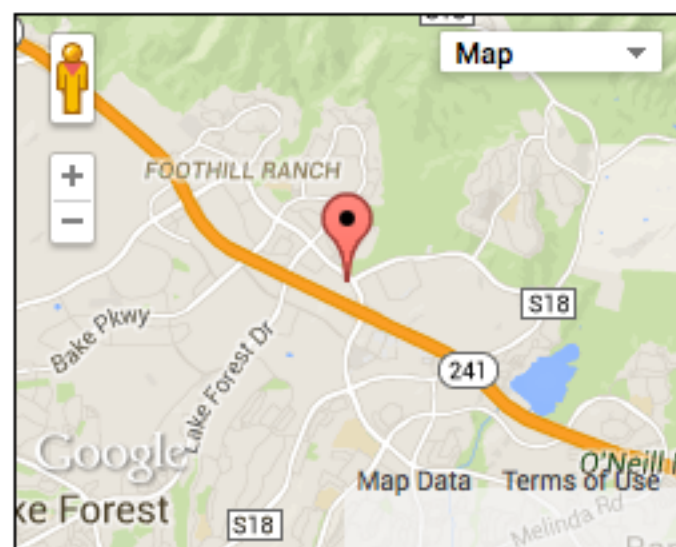
What you notice first is a kitchen framed by a simple mural of a city skyline. If it didn't have a dining room lit by tea lights, you'd assume this was some sort of New York-style deli or pizzeria. You can take a counter seat facing the cooks, but there won't be much to see except their floating heads—the stove and all of the action is hidden behind a tall divider. But even before you arrive, you know it will have a mac and cheese, a burger and pastas on the menu; this is the type of place that sticks to the tried-and-tested. But what you won't anticipate is that the mac and cheese has the good stench of Gruyere; that it's topped with crisp, crumbled prosciutto; or that when you take a forkful, the cheese trails off in honest-to-goodness stretchy webs as though you were eating a pizza.



LP Hastings

South County supper

Location Info



Urban Grill and Wine Bar
27412 Portola Pkwy, D
Lake Forest, CA 92610
Category: Restaurant > New American
Region: Foothill Ranch
[Photos](#)

Details

Urban Kitchen Grill & Wine Bar,
www.urbankitchengrill.com. Open Sun.-Thurs., 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Dinner for two, \$30-\$60, food only. Full bar.

And there's the white-meat chicken strips that top the buttermilk-fried-chicken salad—a salad that also features cucumbers, pumpkin seeds, dried cranberries and actual cornbread torn into chunks. I expected stock fried-from-frozen chicken fingers, but what I encountered was pieces of hen hand-breaded and fried delicately, resulting in something so moist that actual juices burst forth. Get this salad over the salmon version, which ends up being sodden and boring, despite what seems to be a pound of grilled fish squashing flat a bed of greens.

Two steaks are offered, one sauced with cognac and cream, the other a demi-glace. But better and 10 bucks cheaper is a grilled pork chop as thick as the **King James Bible**. If you dare, the pig hunk can be cooked to a pink medium. It'll be served with homemade, dice-sized cubes of roasted potatoes and a chunky, caramelized apple sauce so assertive of cinnamon and tangy it's able to match the fleshy chew of the pork, bite for bite.

Despite the prosciutto-wrapped, gigantic grilled shrimp, you should skip the underseasoned, slightly overcooked pasta. And if you get the scallops, don't bother with the entrée option; opt for the one on the small plates list instead. With a ring-molded stack of jasmine rice, just-ripe mangoes, avocado and pickled radish arranged into flower petals, it will be the same dish, except \$8 cheaper for two scallops instead of three. Urban does it exactly right, with the butter-bathed sea cylinders seared to crispy brownness nearly all the way around and cooked perfectly through the middle. Be aware that though the fish and chips is also found in the small plates section, it's a full meal on its own. Three bloated fish fingers battered not too thickly and fried into golden cocoons are dropped into one of those metal cones with a mess of shoestring fries and two dipping sauces, one of them beguilingly addictive.

Speaking of addiction, Urban Kitchen recently added a deep-fried, cookie-dough dessert. If you think it sounds like something you'd find at the OC Fair, you're right. Two golf ball-sized morsels of nuts, oatmeal and chocolate are breaded and fried, then served on a plate with vanilla ice cream. The dish is so good you almost want to tell the waiter who describes it as a deep-fried version of BJ's Pizookie that the dessert and, in fact, the restaurant are much better than that.

This review appeared in print as "Suburban Splendor: Urban Kitchen Grill & Wine Bar is an indie in Foothill Ranch's land of chains."