

On The Line: David Hall Of Urban Grill & Wine Bar, Part One

By Anne Marie Panoringan Tue., Oct. 16 2012 at 3:00 PM

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Photo by Liz Monroy

Our initial impression of Foothill Ranch was that it was like Philips Ranch--a neighborhood hidden in the shadow of its Pomona. We learned it was actually more like its own city (while technically part of Lake Forest) in need of high-end cuisine. Cue Urban Grill's debut between a Wahoo's and Starbucks just over five months ago. Featuring cultish wines with tastings every other week, 80s flashbacks we love and a collection of local artwork, David Hall mans the kitchen in this labor of love. We sit down a few days after his birthday, his recollection of falling asleep from exhaustion sounding all too familiar of both a chef and owner.

Your earliest food memory:

Captain Crunch cereal-- not the peanut butter. Yuck! The regular is the best (besides the way it tears up the roof of your mouth). I used to kill half a box on a good Saturday morning when I was a kid.

Favorite meal growing up:

Mom's pot roast (She just turned 80 and celebrated her birthday here). It's nothing secret or fancy; Mom's a very meat-and-potatoes kind of cook. We usually had it on Sundays after church. She used chuck, salt and pepper, lightly flour the thing, and make the gravy. Mom's always make the best gravy. I've watched her make it a million times, but I can't seem to duplicate it.

Your best recent food find:

Oregon Creamery smoked bleu cheese. We *were* using it in our special grilled radicchio and Bibb lettuce salad with a 10-year aged balsamic vinaigrette, figs and candied pecans. The cheese is beautiful and unique. Some people come back just to try the cheese because we change our selection every two weeks. It's has a smoky flavor that was kind of overpowering the rest of the salad, so we switched to a Maytag blue. It's now on our cheese plate.

Most undervalued ingredient:

Rice wine vinegar-- it livens up any dish. It's in almost all our dressings. In our house vinaigrette, I use a third of that along with two other vinegars to make it a little more complex. It also adds a little bit of sweetness to all our sauces. We use maybe 10 different vinegars here.

What did you do for Mushroom Week?

We have in season Hen of the Woods, Chanterelles, Portobellos as well as some out of season musts like porcini and morels. Menu includes soup, chicken stuffed with mushrooms, king crab and stuffed open-faced ravioli with Chanterelle cream.

What fast food do you admit to eating?

Fish tacos from Baja Fish Grill, and lots of hot sauce! They are fresh and the textures are perfect. They've got it figured out there. Their beans are really great, too.

What is your beverage of choice, and where do you get it?

I just love a refreshing Rhone blend, Treana White. I've enjoyed it for many years. Even named my dog Treana back in 2000.

Tell us about the check-in special, discounts and any other promotions.

Our "Everything" cookies are complementary to first time diners who find us on Yelp. [Editor's Note: For those of you with allergies, they contain oats, two types of chocolate chips, peanut butter and chopped peanuts.]

What makes your food "Urban"?

We like to think of Urban cuisine as a variety of bistro dishes with influences from many different ethnic groups. We cook what is "comfort" food and has enough variety in the menu for guests to dine here nightly--some actually do!

One food you can't live without:

Pizza-- I love the crispy, yet chewy thin crust style-- Giuseppe's in Pismo (Beach) is my gold standard. I never miss going there when I'm in the area. We always get the Margherita pizza, but they have a prosciutto one that's crazy.

Where was your most recent meal?

Here. I had the fried chicken salad with extra sauce and chicken.

Best culinary tip for the home cook:

Don't overcook it! People will probably think I'm referring to meat, but I'm really talking mostly pastas or rice. There's a fine line when cooking those. If you cross that, you've got muck.

Let's talk Happy Hour-- What's in the grilled cheese? And what are your dipping sauces for those matchstick fries?

Aged cheddar, Gruyere and pesto. (It's) crispy, chewy and delicious! The sauces for the fries are ketchup and a chipotle aioli.

What do you think of people who take photographs of their food?

Geeks or trying to show their cooks how the dish should be plated (me).

Favorite chef.

Mario Batali. He doesn't over complicate things, but lets the quality ingredients speak for themselves.

Dessert! Are deep fried cookie bites exactly how they sound? Were they a happy accident?

The cookie bits were actually a bit of a joke my pastry chef Sera made while the OC Fair was in town--Urban Grill meets the OC Fair. Everyone loves them now, so I have to keep them on the menu!

Weirdest thing you've ever eaten:

Still not a fan, but fermented soybean with a raw quail egg.

What's the inspiration for the Lafrieda burger?

Just trying to produce the best burger I possibly can. The blend of chuck and short rib is perfection!

You're making breakfast. What are you having?

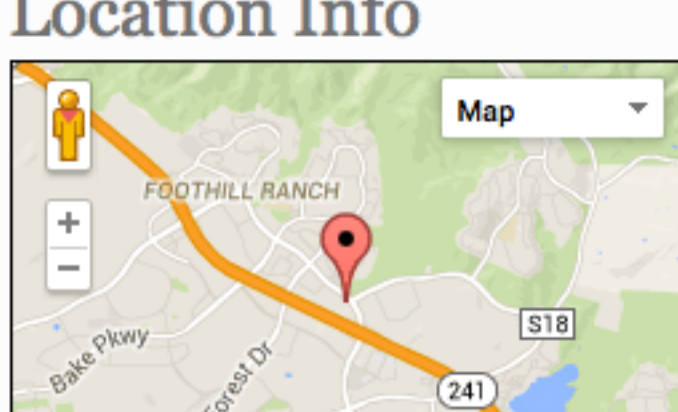
Spicy eggs Benedict with roasted potatoes and chipotle hollandaise.

Weirdest customer request (and did you do it?):

"Puree my meal together." They just had dental work, but wanted a good meal. You bet I did it. Baby food at \$32 a bowl.

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Location Info



Urban Grill and Wine Bar
27412 Portola Pkwy, Lake Forest, CA
Category: Restaurant