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First Bite: Dinner At Plate Shop in Sausalito

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Tucked along the chic part of Caledonia Street, the new [Plate Shop](#) is definitely a game-changer within the Sausalito restaurant scene. As an alumna of notable establishments like Aqua and Manresa, executive chef Kim Alter's ingredient-driven California cuisine is entirely too impressive, and her whole-animal approach will make foodies proud. "We're hoping to bring something different to the area," Alter said.

It's wonderful to see the community supporting this new restaurant -- the place was packed with locals. The airy, modern space is a comfortable mix of industrial accents, communal tables and light wooden floors. Bare lightbulbs hang from the ceiling for a warm and intimate effect.



Due to the kitchen's tiny size, the ultra-seasonal menu is quite compact, but every item we ordered was spot-on in terms of flavor and presentation. You can even taste the unmistakable quality by sampling the house-made bread and freshly churned butter.

One of the favorite appetizers is the smoked risotto with sea urchin and sea beans. This punchy dish melds perfectly with the subtly sweet sea urchin. "It scares people, but they enjoy the way urchin adds a creamy aspect to the dish," Alter explained.

Another killer app is the celery root soup. This rich, cream-based soup is balanced with the tangy strips of Granny Smith apple. The swath of whipped lardo inside of the bowl certainly adds an extra decadent touch. If you have a large appetite and love seafood, definitely split the mackerel with a friend. Accompanied by miso-cured vegetables, this is very delicious with its salty, crispy skin and soft, flaky meat.

For mains, we got the seared Arctic char and the bavette, which were both outstanding. Garnished with a "fish bacon" (fish belly), the char was perfectly seasoned and not dry at all. The kohlrabi, maitake mushrooms and duck jus added earthy dimensions to the palate.

According to Alter, the chicken and pig entrees are really popular. She specializes in using the entire animal (head-to-tail butchery) and plans to feature lamb at some point in the near future. As for the carb lovers, don't fret just yet. "We're gonna make pastas, but it's not imperative," Alter said. "I want to be more whimsical about what we're doing, offer what I feel like cooking and what the community wants."

Alter also makes her own desserts, and they change regularly each week. The D44 is a sophisticated presentation of chocolate ganache, peanut butter, caramelized banana, tobacco meringue and bourbon gastrique. We were also curious about the monkey bread brioche but were too stuffed at this point to order another dessert.

What's really cool about Plate Shop is that Alter has cultivated a sizable backyard garden behind the restaurant. After spending a year working at a Santa Cruz farm, her green thumb created an 18-bed garden that includes a chicken coop as well as a small shed filled with trays of microgreens and herbs.

Diners can look forward to tasting seasonal vegetables like turnips and radishes, which will soon be ready for spring harvest. "We want to grow something that is expensive to source, like New Zealand spinach," Alter said. "People are more than welcome to see it while having a glass of champagne in the summertime."

39 Caledonia St., Sausalito; 415-887-9047

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A San Francisco native, Tami loves to write about dining, fashion, beauty and travel. She has also written for AOL Digital City, Caviar Affair magazine and AOL's When.com.

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