

# WESTENDER

EVERYTHING VANCOUVER

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## ANCORA MARKS THE RETURN OF FINE WATERFRONT DINING

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Executive Chef Ricardo Valverde marks a return to formal dining in Vancouver, with Ancora. — Jennifer Gauthier photo

## Ancora Waterfront Dining & Patio

1600 Howe | 604-681-1164 | [AncoraDining.com](http://AncoraDining.com) | Open Tuesday-Sunday, 3pm-midnight.

There's an old adage about restaurants that has historically proven itself in Vancouver: The closer you are to the water, the worse the food. There have been a few exceptions, but, with the opening of Ancora on False Creek, that maxim now thankfully proves to be less true.

Ancora is building on the surprising change in terminally-casual Vancouver, of fine dining making an actual comeback. This isn't a passing fancy anymore, as the success of fellow newcomers [Giardino](#) and [Masayoshi](#) show. But, forget your preconceived notions of what is meant by fine dining. No stuffy service, no tablecloths. Instead, lots of light and a clean design that emphasizes the waterfront setting. The space – which formerly housed the award-winning C Restaurant – has seen some upper window additions that turn the second floor mezzanine into a space that people might actually prefer.



The service is formal, but only in the sense that it's excellent. The FOH team under GM and wine director Andrea Vescovi (formerly of Blue Water Café), who also oversees sister restaurant Beach Bay Café, is smooth, friendly and unobtrusive. Vescovi has put together a rather stunning wine list, but have restaurant director Tara Thom (another Blue Water alumnus) take you through it if you can. Her warm personality adds just the right level of laughter and cheer to the experience.

Executive chef Ricardo Valverde oversees the menu, along with raw bar chef Yoshi Tabo (two more Blue Water alum). Here's where things get really interesting. This isn't just a seafood restaurant, it's a seafood restaurant that focuses on Peruvian-Japanese cuisine. (Pause for jaws to close.)

It's not that outlandish. Peruvian-Japanese cuisine, thanks to the laudable immigration policies of Peru more than one hundred years ago, is a bona fide cultural fusion, much like Filipino-Chinese cuisine. Valverde originally hails from Peru, and he has infused the selection of Ocean Wise seafood with some rather bold and unexpected flavours. Dungeness crab causa (\$17) are whipped and chilled Yukon Golds topped with crab, Kalamata emulsion, quail egg and crispy yam chips. It sits in a lush *huancaína* sauce, a classic Peruvian spicy cheese sauce made from queso fresco and aji amarillo peppers. It's not a typical flavour profile, but, if you can get past the unexpectedness of the combination, it works perfectly.

Some of the bold flavours go a little far, like with the sablefish (\$34) topped with chermoula, roasted fennel and wild leek. The chermoula, a popular middle eastern marinade primarily used for seafood, is so dominant that it completely overpowers the silky and beautifully-prepared black cod. Hiccups like these are the exception, however.





Mussels off the holiday lunch menu are so plump and perfect, they practically burst in the mouth. The scallop and pork belly, with sunchokes grown in Vescovi's garden, is lush and lovely. And the raw bar, run by Tabo, is stunning. The "Glacier", a large shareable platter of chilled seafood, is loaded with sustainable jumbo prawns, mussels dressed with Peruvian *escabeche*, ceviche, oysters, causa, sashimi and tartare. At \$72 for two, it's a bit dear, but oh, so delicious.

Pastry chef Amy Lin is another Blue Water find, and a good one. Spiced picarones (\$11) are traditional Peruvian fried doughnuts, tiny and round, served with dulce de leche and spiced almonds.

Ancora is a bit "spendy," as one friend put it, but it's worth every penny, and this restaurant is going a long way to making that old adage nothing more than an outdated cliché.



**Food: \*\*\*\***

**Service: \*\*\*\*\***

**Ambiance: \*\*\*\*\***

**Value: \*\*\*\***

**Overall: \*\*\*\*1/2**

***All ratings out of five stars.***

**\*: Okay, nothing memorable.**

**\*\* : Good, shows promise.**

**\*\*\*: Very good, occasionally excellent.**

**\*\*\*\*: Excellent, consistently above average.**

**\*\*\*\*\*: Awe-inspiring, practically perfect in every way.**