



THE DISH

Ancora Waterfront Dining and Patio: A Vancouver paradise for any palate

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VANCOUVER — Special to The Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Dec. 04, 2015 8:17PM EST

Last updated Friday, Dec. 04, 2015 8:19PM EST

Name Ancora Waterfront Dining and Patio

Location 1600 Howe St.

City Vancouver

Province British Columbia

Phone 604-681-1164

Website
ancoradining.com

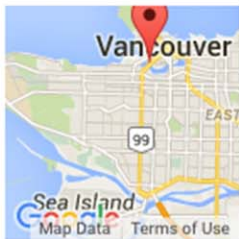
Cuisine Japanese and Peruvian

Rating System Fine Dining

Appetizer Price Range
15.00 - 23.00

Entrée Price Range
29.00 - 46.00

Additional Info Open for dinner Tues. to Sun. from 5 to 11 p.m.; bar, 3 p.m. to midnight. Reservations recommended.



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Once upon a time, C Restaurant and Blue Water Cafe competed fiercely for the title of Vancouver's – nay, Canada's – finest seafood restaurant. Although both were recognized far and wide, the former fell into tragic hardship and closed last year. While it may be true that the latter, now under new ownership, has never been busier, its sense of adventure faded long ago.

Ancora, almost like an ancient goddess arising from False Creek sea foam and flotsam, is their new golden offspring. (In keeping with the mythical deities theme, the consummation was not exactly consensual.)

Owned by Viaggio Hospitality Group, Ancora is in the former C Restaurant space, which has been spiffed up with aquamarine accents, crystal chandeliers and even more windows on the mezzanine level to take full advantage of the seawall views. Most of the restaurant's senior staff was poached from Blue Water Cafe, including executive chef Ricardo Valverde, general manager and wine director Andrea Vescovi and pastry chef Amy Lee. Raw bar chef Yoshi Tabo and restaurant director Tara Thom are also Blue Water alumni.

Ancora, however, is neither a miniature Blue Water nor a retrofitted C. Having inherited the best of its progenitors – front-room elegance, culinary finesse, excellent wines, dedication to

sustainable seafood, to-die-for location – it has transcended both with its own thoroughly modern Peruvian-Japanese twist.

Peruvian and Japanese? It is not as strange as it sounds. Peru was the first South American country to accept Japanese immigrants, in 1899.

The influence was huge. Nikkei, the country's Japanese-Peruvian fusion cuisine, has recently become one the world's biggest gastronomic sensations.

Mr. Valverde, who was born in Peru and moved to Canada when he was 18, is not trying to be traditional or derivative. His fusion dishes combine Peru's bold spicing with the freshness of our long-time Japanese-inflected West Coast seafood cuisine. Yet, it all tastes new, delicious and will grab you by the seat of your palate.

Take the chef's Dungeness crab causa, for instance. Mr. Valverde could not import the proper potatoes to make this mashed dish as his grandmother did, but he adapted the recipe with local Yukon golds that are exactly steamed, sieved and emulsified (with olive oil, bright orange aji amarillo, salt and fresh-squeezed lime) and rolled like flour gnocchi into stout yet meltingly tender columns. He tops them with pulled crab and various toppings – hard-boiled eggs, local caviar, guacamole – and plates them in a pool of spicy huancaína cheese sauce with dabs of deeply earthy Kalamata olive purée. I don't know if it's traditional and I couldn't care less, because the combination of punchy flavours and sublime textures tastes absolutely divine.

As does mixto ceviche, the chef's murky take on a classic Peruvian street dish with its buttery Humboldt squid, mussels, scallops and shrimp all cold-cooked in a spicy togarashi and cilantro marinade, then tossed with yam, deep-fried squid tendrils and fresh spiced wakame seaweed. This is a dish that will make you bow down and ask: "Wow, where have you been all my life?"

The Japanese influence mostly comes courtesy of Yoshi Tabo, who is still executing the same masterful sushi he created at Blue Water (before he was uselessly recruited and basically put out to pasture at The Keg's ill-conceived and short-lived Ki Restaurant). It is so great to see his silky edged sashimi and exquisitely textured rolls back in action. His raw-bar station has four high-stool seats should you be so inclined.

The Ancora Glacier – the new take on a seafood tower, served in an elevated flat pan – is a good way to experience the chefs' combined talents. The mussel escabeche is a smoky, sweet, spicy delight unlike any I have tasted to date.

But they also work together in interesting ways on the main menu. Lightly smoked yellowfin tuna is probably overly smoked for Mr. Tabo's tastes, but it nevertheless incorporates his special recipe for succulently braised daikon and an unbelievably clean dashi broth.

While there may be some heavy handed mole-jus chicken misses, there are more sweetly melty panca-glazed sablefish hits. These are primarily new flavours and combinations. They are not going to please everyone.

Yet, the kitchen is doing an admirable job of pleasing the masses while introducing new flavours. Not in the mood for spiced lingcod on Himalayan black rice with baby corn and paprika emulsion? Why not try house-made linguine tossed with uni butter and caviar? Or a vegetarian ceviche?

Not many restaurants succeed at trying to introduce something new while being many things to all people. With a few exceptions – which mostly comes down to anxious servers who are too quick to inquire how you are enjoying your dish or remove a glass of wine before you have finished – Ancora is doing exceptionally well.

This is a fine dining seafood restaurant with polish, flair and vision that would make its heroized parents very proud and their customers extremely happy.