

The Beach House in Kauai – food that rivals the sunsets

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By Kathryn Reed

Ambiance, service, food – those are the three main ingredients for a memorable dining experience. The Beach House in Koloa, Kauai, nails it on all three.

December was my first trip to this Hawaiian island, therefore my initial visit to the Beach House. My sister, Pam, first told me about the restaurant – it's where she and her husband, Bob, had their wedding dinner three years ago.

It is the only non-resort beachfront restaurant on the Garden Island. Owners Roy Dunn and Mike Hooks used to own the Big Water Grille in Incline. The building has been built three times. The last time was after Hurricane Iniki leveled it in 1992.

We had reservations for 5:30pm in order to witness the sun sinking into the Pacific. With the temperate climate, window seating takes on a new meaning. The view is unobstructed by glass. Diners leave their seats to take pictures of themselves, the setting sun framed by the palm trees and enhanced by tiki torches.

General Manager Jordan James admits this can create havoc for the kitchen because food may be ready but no one is at the table. Still, with seating for 240, the staff seems to have figured out how to make it all work.

Sue's seafood corn chowder was piping hot. My watermelon salad

was exquisite. I was more than satisfied with the one vegetarian entree – a portobello mushroom ensemble. Sue still talks about the roasted garlic black truffle ono entree she devoured.

The restaurant is one of those where you don't know the waiter is there, but the water glass is never empty, the wine is poured without interruption in conversation, napkins are folded when you're off taking pictures.

It's a good idea to make dinner reservations right after booking your flight.

Pam and Bob dined at the Beach House a couple nights after us. Pam tried the recipe that is below. She raved about the dish and said the \$30 she spent was well worth it. Bob had the macadamia nut crusted mahimahi, which is the restaurant's best seller.

Save room for dessert – the molten chocolate desire is outrageously phenomenal.

Fresh fish is guaranteed because the restaurant hires people to fish for them locally. Other fish comes from the surrounding islands.

Chef Todd Barrett said he doesn't have one fish that he likes to work with more than another. Much of his time is spent on perfecting sauces for them. He hails from the Bay Area. Barrett will be on the South Shore this month to celebrate a friend's 40th birthday, to ski a little and show his 8-year-old daughter snow for the first time.

Wasabi Crusted Snapper

Serves 4-6 people, leftovers of butter compound can hold a couple weeks. This is good on any white fish.

1 lb unsalted butter

6 T wasabi powder or premade wasabi paste

Salt and pepper

Panko (Japanese bread crumbs)

If using wasabi powder, make it into a paste. Then whip butter and wasabi in blender to make smooth paste. Season with salt and pepper. Whip in Panko so it is evenly distributed. Mixture should be pliable, but thick.

Butter Sauce:

$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ C dry white wine

$\frac{1}{2}$ shallot, diced

Fresh thyme sprigs

Several white or black peppercorns

$\frac{1}{2}$ C fresh lemon juice

$\frac{1}{2}$ C fresh passion fruit juice (lilikoi)

$\frac{1}{2}$ C heavy whipping cream

1 lb butter

In sauce pan, add the first six ingredients. Bring to a boil so the liquid is reduced in half. Then add up to $\frac{1}{2}$ C cream to double the volume. Taste. If more lilikoi is needed, add 1 tsp at a time. Then over medium heat reduce the cream mixture by half so it is bubbly and thick. Then add about 1 T of butter at a time to double the amount of liquid so it comes $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ C of liquid in pan. Stir constantly while adding butter. Once butter is melted and desired amount of liquid is created, strain out shallots, peppercorns and any pulp. It's imperative to keep liquid warm, but not over heat so the butter doesn't burn.

Fish

4-6 white fish fillets

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Use sautee pan that can go under a broiler. Put in a liberal amount of olive oil. Get it hot. Season fillets with salt and pepper. Throw them in pan. Sear first side so it gets color – 1.5-2 minutes. Flip the fillet. Spoon the wasabi mixture on top in an even layer. When the fish is still medium raw, finish cooking it under a broiler so the butter is cooked out and the wasabi is melted into the top of the fish. This should be 3-4 minutes. Fish should be 6-8 inches below the fire. Keep an eye on the fish.

The Beach House serves this dish with a vegetable medley and steamed rice.