



## [Restaurant Review |](#)

### **Fab Palace, No Clothes**

By [Naomi Wise](#) | Published Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2006

#### [Addison](#)

5200 Grand Del Mar Way, Del Mar, 858-314-1900

*Purity is the focus of all things pure. This is our belief and expression which I apply to the style of our cuisine and ambience. With this, we give you our new venture in the world of gastronomic pleasures.*

-- Chef William Bradley, on Addison's menu

We felt as if we were living the pre-credit scene of *The Shining*. My partner and I, in our shabby little car, drove higher and higher through wooded hills on a winding mountain road, seeking Addison restaurant before nightfall. But the approach road to Kubrick's "Overlook" didn't include several sets of speed bumps.

Situated at the Grand Del Mar, Addison is named for an early--20th-Century California architect, Addison Mizner. The restaurant, with its lobby and bar, stands alone a mile or so uphill from the hotel at Doug Manchester's new luxury resort. Its architecture is Mediterranean, while the interior decor harks back to Victorian splendor. Above the bar hangs a dark-red fringed swag. The floors are a mix of marble and polished "distressed" hardwood. There are ornate fireplaces everywhere, including one in an outdoor nook, where you can wait for your friends, your chariot, or your prince to come. The vast dining room has well-spaced tables to seat 90, with white linen cloths and captain's chairs. A large staff of uniformed employees, as highly choreographed as the Rockettes, exercises a rather rigid style of formal service.

For example, you must wait in the bar until your entire party has arrived -- no trickle-ins allowed. (For another instance, golf club members have a separate entrance, so they don't have to mingle in the lobby with the hoi polloi.) A hostess escorted us to the bar, where posse regular Cheryl was already waiting with a glass of Syrah. Cheryl told us that the Grand Del Mar is under consideration as a venue for the 2008 U.S. Open -- not for the golf course (Torrey Pines has already won that bid), but for its facilities. (She's on one of the subcommittees making similar decisions for the corporation where she works.) Meanwhile, we pored over a wine list the size of the Gutenberg Bible. A novella's worth of pages is devoted to half-bottles alone

(including a split of three-year-old Mouton for \$2660 that should optimally stay cellared for another five or six years; for comparison, a few years ago the Wine Bank downtown was asking \$100 for fully mature half-bottles of Mouton '82). If you want to bring your own, corkage is \$25, and they frown on your schlepping any bottle that duplicates one they might offer. Since the list is so comprehensive, you'd be safest with Mad Dog 20-20. I don't think they carry that.

Once Sam arrived, we were shown to our table. The menu offers six appetizers and six entrées, plus a prix-fixe tasting dinner. Although the publicity materials claim that dishes are seasonal, the current menu is similar to the September opening menu shown on the website, with small changes in garnishes. All menu titles consist of the main ingredient, three words maximum, with garnishes listed on the next line. As we looked things over, a server poured Evian water at no extra charge.

Once we'd ordered, the evening's "amuse" arrived. Two or three tart purple gooseberries and a few dice of puckery quince bobbed in a lake of sour yogurt with olive oil floating around the edges. Some chefs have a sweet tooth. As we were to learn, Bradley must have a sour tooth. Sam tasted the dish, grimaced, and shook his head like a wet dog. Cheryl tasted it, and her face froze in the shocked embarrassment of somebody witnessing a fatal faux pas. My partner said, "Yuck." Was the chef trying to electrify our senses -- or electrocute them? We were not amused, but I kept spooning into the stuff in vain hope of discovering a point to it all, something to like.

A server brought butter and soft little rolls (one per person), each pierced by a thin cracker. We nibbled and chatted for quite a while as we awaited appetizers. Then seven servers simultaneously brought fresh silverware, removed the charger plates, and in the same heartbeat plunked down our appetizers, here termed "pre-courses." Our favorite, if you can call it that, was titled "Prawns." Two moderately large, fresh shrimp were plated over a sauce of garlic confit the color and texture of peanut butter diluted in cream, with a tiny daub of lemon-lime jam at one edge of the plate and one large pitted date (described on the menu as "dates" -- plural) on the opposite edge. Each flavor was intense, but what did these foodstuffs have to do with each other? Perhaps this was an attempt to tickle many taste receptors at once, the way Thai food does. It missed the mark: where Thai cooks brilliantly bring multiple tastes together in flashy harmonies, this was culinary chaos. The prawns and the garlic sauce ignored each other, even in the same mouthful, while the jam and the date snubbed them both.

When describing our assorted "pre-courses," the waiter proclaimed that the Taylor Bay scallops came from Maryland (when in fact they're farmed off Nantucket, Mass.) and were "free range." "What's the difference between free-range and regular scallops?" Sam asked once the waiter had gone. "All scallops are free range," my partner offered. "They're not stuck on a rock like mussels; they're jet-propelled and move around to look for food." These were mild-mannered bay scallops, some with sand in them, afloat in a pale pond the menu dubbed *Beurre d'Isigny*. That's a premium French brand of butter, but the liquid in this concoction tasted more like thin cream sauce, bedecked with a few pleasantly bitter blanched celery-heart leaves to bestow flavor (if not color) to the unrelieved sea of white on white. (Could this be what the chef meant by "purity" in his menu preface quoted above?)

Steak tartare sounded as though it might resemble the classic version, since the menu said it came with a "cocotte of farm eggs" as well as an untraditional "Gouda fondue." To our dismay, the insipid raw beef had none of the typical strong seasonings (parsley, capers, etc.). In fact, it tasted barely seasoned. Alongside was a single, delicious soft egg (the best part of the dish) and hard pieces of aged dry cheese. I'm usually pleased when a chef salts food sparingly, as is the case here. However, there's no salt (or pepper) on the table, should you care to adjust things to your taste. "I season in layers," the chef later told me, and he's not

enthusiastic about diners re-seasoning his dishes after he's worked so hard to "emphasize pure flavors." If you do request salt, the server will bring Fleur de Sel -- the perfect condiment to lend more life to some preparations.

Foie gras, plated on a miniature square of French toast, was competently sautéed but hardly worth noticing. It came with candied quince and a miniature mound of unidentifiable mushy greens that turned out to be Savoy cabbage.

At this point, we realized that we couldn't discern what we were putting in our mouths without a scorecard -- the flavors were often strange and etiolated, as well as unrelated. I asked a server if I could have a copy of the menu "to take home as a souvenir." Of course I could, he said, and walked away. We plodded on, unenlightened and frustrated, so I asked again. He said it would be waiting at the hostess's station when we left. I begged for it -- *now!* -- as we could more fully appreciate the artistry if we knew what we were eating. He looked displeased but duly delivered a miniature reproduction, two small pages neatly bound with a brown ribbon through the top left corner, ready to be handed out like a diploma to Addison's guests at their graduation ceremonies.

When we'd finished our starters, a gaggle of bussers swooped to clear the table of everything -- including the bread plates. After seeing my friends robbed of theirs, I insisted on keeping mine (with half a roll left), so I'd have something to sop up any entrée sauces. This required a power struggle with a busser. (The chef told me this was an error -- a premature evacuation.)

Two entrées were quite good, or parts of them were. The dish called "lamb" included a side of crepinette (uncured, coarse-ground sausage) to go with the well-seasoned lamb shank, which exuded molten butter when cut into, in the manner of Chicken Kiev. I liked it very much, as did my partner. Sam and Cheryl preferred the herb-crustéd hunk of roast lamb, ribs cut off their bones just before serving -- you could call it "off the rack." The roast sat atop "pickled plums" -- a tart purée (probably *umeboshi*, Japanese sour plum sauce) that seemed to come from a different universe than the meat. The star of the lamb array was a moist, melty round goat cheese tart, over a slick of acidic lemon-sorrel sauce that complemented the cheese.

"Cod" was a crisp, crumb-crustéd rectangle of fish, like a classy (\$35) version of fish 'n' chips. The fish was excellent, as was the single roasted tomatillo (plural on the menu, of course), an earthy white bean purée, and a chartreuse avocado purée. The cod lay atop an unidentified orange-colored sauce involving mild puréed chilies, but where was the real-life correlative to the menu's promise of "orange," unless it referred to the sauce's color? Oh, wait, could "orange" be a wee spot of citrus jam near the plate-rim?

"Poularde" featured several moist and flavorful breast slices from the legendary blue-legged French species, *poulet de Bresse*, raised in Northern California on corn and milk (and spayed, which is what makes it a poularde, rather than a mere hen). It tasted the way chicken ought to taste. Alongside was puréed butternut squash and a heaplet of sweet onion "soubise" (here meaning caramelized onion shreds, rather than Julia Child's creamy pudding of that name). No taste clashes, merely two flavors with small variations -- fine poultry, and a double header of sweetness. And a dish of John Dory tasted nothing like that fishy fish. It had the typical meaty texture of the species, but its flavor was neutral. It came with cruciferous veggie bits in a loose, tart sauce studded with capers and one lonely clam. My partner got the clam. It was a good clam, he said.

The fishes came with feeble fish knives (the weaker sisters of butter spreaders). The lamb came with a steak knife, and the fowl with a regular table knife. Although the restaurant seems to own a sufficient quantity of

silverware, and we had been brazenly sharing appetizers, the staff stuck to the formal tradition: One Dish, One Knife. It goes with One Man, One Clam, I guess, as though sharing food were, to the hidebound servers, some outré custom of hide-clad barbarians.

If Addison hopes to attract diners beyond those buying the mansion-sized "cottages" on the property or joining the golf club, I'd expect the staff to display as much care for customers' pleasure as for the corporate regimen of restaurant conduct. I humbly suggest that the management bring in a team from El Bizcocho to retrain the service crew or hire one of the courtly retired waiters from pre-renovation Grant Grill as a consultant. What we missed is the skill to serve formally but flexibly in the modern manner and to deal with people who are there to enjoy eating -- rather than, say, customers who've always lived at the Overlook (or its ilk) and may be using the pricey restaurant primarily to display their economic standing. The current thrust of the dining room seems to be more about status than sensory satisfaction.

Entrées done, the ordeal by culinary preciousness was finally over. Now we could finally enjoy some full-flavored avant-garde sweets by Jack Fisher (formerly of Region and 910), one of my favorite dessert chefs, and the real reason I wanted to eat at Addison. His work didn't disappoint us -- we experienced, at last, the "gastronomic pleasures" the menu quote had promised.

A panna cotta, delicately flavored with fresh-grated nutmeg, was perfect -- as light and trembly as a nymphet's breast. An assemblage of bittersweet chocolate mousse, milk chocolate ice cream, and tart passionfruit syrup was vivid and coherent. Yet Fisher's panache couldn't sweeten the aftertaste of earlier courses.

Although every dish in the meal had been made with superior ingredients and was flawlessly executed, none of our quartet was able to warm up to or comprehend chef Bradley's palate. The final question about any restaurant is: Would I go back? I'd originally planned on a second dinner to check out the tasting menu. After our meal, the answer changed to "I wouldn't go back if somebody paid me!" -- and somebody does.

## ABOUT THE CHEF

William Bradley is a local San Diegan, a protégé of famed chef James Boyce (who simultaneously trained Michael Stebner of the late Region, among others). "I started cooking as a necessity for skateboards," he says. "At 16, my skateboard habit became expensive, so I went to work as a dishwasher at a small Italian restaurant in the Bonita area called Buon Giorno. Once I started cooking there, I started to have a passion for being able to express yourself on a plate through food. I worked there for a couple of years, then went over to the Loewe's Coronado Bay and started working with my longtime mentor, James Boyce. I spent three and a half years with him at Azzura Point. Then I went with Boyce to Scottsdale, Arizona, and stayed with him at Mary Ellen's at the Phoenician as a sous-chef -- altogether I worked about seven and a half years with him.

"Then we had to part ways. He went to the Montage [in Laguna Beach], and I stayed in Phoenix and opened up a restaurant at the Hyatt Regency [Scottsdale Resort and Spa] by the name Vu," pronounced "view." (Editor's note: With Bradley at the helm, Vu was cited as one of *Esquire* magazine's "Best New Restaurants" of 2005, and Bradley was a three-time candidate for the James Beard "Rising Star Chef" award. Then Bradley accepted the job of executive chef at Addison.)

"My philosophy of cooking is to keep the food very simple but to maximize the flavor of each paired ingredient. It's kind of 'less is more.' I don't like to put a lot of ingredients on the plate. I feel that if you take

all your thought processes, your passion, your heart, and your mind, and you put it into a few small elements and concentrate on the technique of cooking that perfect ingredient, you can really come up with some special dishes -- that people are still familiar with. I don't believe in scaring the diner.... There's nothing wrong with a simple dish -- like risotto. If you have a unique technique to making it the creamiest risotto that anyone's ever had, everyone's very familiar with that and they see the complexity of the technique in each dish.

"I don't highlight it, because I think as a chef you always ought to get the best ingredients, but I get 80 percent of my vegetables from Tierra Niguel, a 100 percent organic farm in North County, and I use only free-range organic poultry, hormone-free beef from Brandt, and wild-caught fish.... You start out with the most perfectly nurtured vegetable picked at its peak, and my job is to cull the essence of that vegetable and then enhance it."

I asked him his idea behind the yogurt amuse. "I really feel that in an amuse," he said, "there should be no complications. My philosophy is to keep it simple and have a lot of exciting little flavors that alert the palate -- the coolness of the yogurt, the tartness of the gooseberries and the quince. It's very light but full of flavor. I try to have the meal go in a progression. I want to keep it simple at the beginning and try to have the bigger hitters at the end, to keep that kind of concentration through the experience."

\*\*\*\*\*

*Errata: In the review of Addison Restaurant (12/28/06), the vintage year of a half-bottle of Mouton Rothschild was misidentified. It was not 2003 but 1961, one of the greatest postwar vintages of Bordeaux. In addition, a copy-editing error produced an incorrect depiction of the lamb entrée. It did not include a separate lamb shank, but rather, a crepinette made from shank meat.*