

# LEISURE

## Something for Everyone

*At Cypress Lowcountry Grille, every palate is pleased*

BY WENDY SWAT SNYDER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLGER OBENAU

When talk turns to the table and artisanal meat enters the conversation, Craig Deihl's name is quick to come up. The executive chef of Cypress Lowcountry Grille, Deihl has been

at the forefront of charcuterie production in Charleston since 2007, partnering with local, sustainable farms and making the most of pastured pork and beef from nose to tail.

A winner of numerous accolades and a

James Beard Foundation Award semifinalist and finalist multiple times, Deihl swept the San Francisco-based Good Food Awards for two consecutive years in the charcuterie category for his "cypressatta," and in





his picante salami stole the show. His *culatello*—a cut from the pork butt that is cured and aged for two years—has made it to the 2014 semifinals.

Deihl is a founding member of the Butcher's Guild, a network of meat professionals that promotes responsible butchering. He and his team craft these rich meats in the

cool recesses of Cypress. Together they produce a variety of house-cured meats and over 80 types of charcuterie, including duck pate, summer sausage, head cheese, pork rillettes, lamb bacon, and 'nduja, a spicy spreadable Italian salami—85 percent fatty pork and 15 percent hot pepper powder—that is fermented, smoked and cured.

Driving his passion for preserving meat is a commitment to utilizing every part of the animal. Production is so extensive, he's created an Artisan Meat Share program that gives participants access to local charcuterie and, in turn, provides farmers with support from increased demand for their product.



From beginning to end, the menu reads like a celebration of protein: artisan meats; shellfish; starters such as tuna roll, crab cake and deviled lobster; fish; meats; and a few decadent old-school classics—think chateaubriand, rack of lamb—luxuriously presented for two.

And so it is.

So I felt mildly curious, when I called to make a dinner reservation, about what was in store for us since I had requested meatless courses for my vegan guest. With a day or two of notice, I was told, the chef would happily make the necessary adjustments. Meaning: no meat, no fish, no animal-related products whatsoever.

We weren't disappointed. Seated in a banquette in full view of a dramatic wall of wines—4,500 in all—rising two stories above the dining room, we waited in anticipation as our server, Dutch, expertly assisted us. What came out of the exhibition kitchen alongside my meat and seafood dishes were four beautiful vegan courses

created expressly for my guest.

For starters, she was presented with roasted local beets, frisee, and baby lolla rossa tossed with lemon and olive oil, finished with fresh grated horseradish that elevated the dish with bold flavor.

In season and sensational, my gently roasted oysters were locally sourced from Frank Roberts' Lady's Island Oyster Farm. My dish was enhanced with an exotic XO sauce, a classic Asian condiment that pairs well with the crustaceans. The heady mixture is composed of cured meats, dried scallops, shrimp, abalone and cuttlefish cooked down with onions, garlic and sesame oil until caramelized.

Deihl contends that this time of year, we should be roasting every weekend and celebrating the oysters in our waters. Noting that not many people use the XO sauce, Deihl says, "When we put a flavor in a dish—it's big."

Deihl also celebrates the cool oyster-producing months with a fried variety served with dried bresaola over peppery arugula and a horseradish cream, creating a flavor profile that is salty, peppery and tangy.

The next vegan offering was a dish of crispy Brussels sprouts and ember-roasted shiitake mushrooms tossed with pumpkin seeds and vincotto—a sweet, dense condiment—served over chiles, whole grain mustard, and finished with extra virgin olive oil.

My shrimp and grits presentation was novel, pairing tasty, locally sourced shrimp with hearty hominy grits that Deihl processes in-house to achieve a larger granule.

The cucumber tuna roll, served with nori chips, avocado cream, Korean pepper and sesame oil, was light and fresh, and the kitchen cleverly mimicked it with a vegan version. The thinly sliced cucumber wrap sans tuna featured arugula, cilantro and carrots tossed with sesame oil and soy sauce. It was served over pineapple wasabi and accompanied by nori chips dusted with Korean pepper and sesame seeds.

My friend's next dish was a "beefy" portobello mushroom, smoked and grilled, accompanied by pan-roasted fennel, cipollini onions, sweet red pepper and black cherry tomatoes. The substantial offering was served over garlic jasmine rice, finished

with extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper.

A plate of snapper ended the round of savory dishes on a high note. The perfectly cooked fish was tender, and the skin, crispy. It was served with a “garnish” of lightly fried calamari and a pearly textured rice cooked in squid ink, salting it with just the right taste of the sea.

I sampled the caramel apple shortcake, which consisted of a not-too-sweet caramel apple compote, brown sugar whipped cream and caramel sauce atop a crunchy sweet biscuit.

Deihl says growing up with nightly family dinners made by his mother—an “unbelievable” cook—remains one of the biggest influences he has had as a chef. He found his way to the South by way of the culinary program at Johnson and Wales University and worked in the kitchen of a sister restaurant, Magnolias, for five years before joining owner T.J. Parsell and the Cypress startup team in 2001.

The Pennsylvania native says that bold, punchy flavors have always intrigued him—hence the subtle Asian influence in his preparations—and that he gets inspiration from global ingredients he likes to pair with locally grown products.

Chef de cuisine Bob Cook blends ingredients such as hardy local winter vegetables—turnips, rutabagas, mustard greens and kale—into a first-rate kimchi for which he’s gained notoriety around town.

Of course, meats remain the major focus at Cypress Lowcountry Grille—the upscale eatery even rolls out a \$5 hamburger every Monday night that’s popular with the bar crowd, but I understand the accommodating Deihl has added a few meat-free burgers to that menu. ♦

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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