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Foodie SECTION

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By Jackie & Luann

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Restaurants often lure diners in with the promise of a specific “dining experience.” Honu Kitchen and Cocktails, a beacon of (dim, romantic) light in the downtown Huntington dining scene, swiftly takes you from the busy, buzzing sidewalk of New York Avenue into an intimate, trendy and authentic dining experience unlike any other in the village.

When we entered the 363 New York Ave. restaurant, we were immediately impressed by the well-utilized and spaced out dining room, where there is an abundance of booth and table seating that does not force guests to sit on top of one another.

The luminous, towering bar spans almost the entire length of the restaurant, and the dramatic fixture is a fitting centerpiece for the sleek Huntington hotspot.

Owner Mark Zecher, who is originally from Rochester and bought Honu in early 2011, bolstered the vibrant restaurant with his knowledge of the seasonality of the industry.

Since Zecher came on board, a significant focus of the Honu menu — both drink and food — is playing up the flavors of the current season.

Reveling in the familiar flavors of the fall, Honu certainly knows how to celebrate the very best notes of the season.

When it comes to his cocktails, Zecher’s menu is anything but short of innovative. Honu offers a seasonal, clear liquor take on moonshine by making its own pumpkin-infused vodka, in house, used in the “Pumpkin Cider” (\$10) cocktail. Zecher said his staff slice, seed and roast the pumpkins before marinating them in a jar filled with vodka. Zecher mixes his fall creation with fresh-pressed cider from the Jericho Cider Mill, and finishes the drink with cinnamon sugar on the rim and a cinnamon stick. Forget pumpkin spice lattes—if you want to drink fall, Honu is the place to do it.

Zecher and his bar staff knocked each

one of their signature cocktails out of the park, including the Harvest Moon Old Fashioned (\$12) which transforms bourbon into a “light-drinker friendly” beverage. The drink fuses Jim Bean Red Stag Apple Cider Bourbon, muddled fall fruit, bitters and a splash of apple cider.

“I’d call it a fall version of the Arnold old fashioned, but not as strong,”



The delicious seared sea scallops have a unique and distinct sweetly caramelized flavor, complimented well by the chipotle barbecue sauce and fresh corn.

Zecher said of his creation.

The simple Seasonal Sangria (\$10) made with red wine, Bacardi oakheart spiced rum and autumn fruit is top notch; as is the Absolut pear martini (\$11) made with pear nectar, elderflower and lemon was tangy and pleasantly bitter.

The signature coconut martini (\$10), served year round, is made with Cruzan coconut and pineapple rum, pineapple juice and toasted coconut, is sure to be a crowd pleaser.

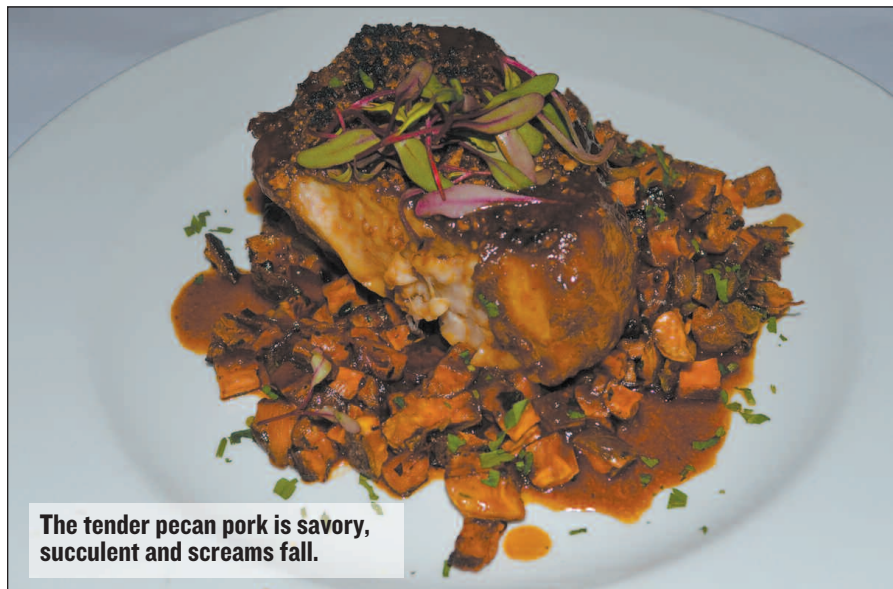
Now, on to the “kitchen” part of the evening.

We were spoiled with the small plates portion of the menu, which offers delicious and manageable portions of items you would hope to see in entrée form.

The Pumpkin Tortellini (\$13), made with roasted pumpkin seeds and crumbled goat cheese, is an upscale serving of comfort food, hitting all the right spots both in flavor and size.

Available during most seasons are the Seared Sea Scallops appetizer (\$14). Served with a thick chipotle barbecue sauce and fresh creamed corn, Honu transforms the traditional scallop into a signature dish with a sweet caramelized flavor all its own.

The tender and warm Peking Duck (\$13) is prepared with scallion, julienne cucumber and hoisin sauce, and sits atop



The tender pecan pork is savory, succulent and screams fall.

Honu: A Restaurant For All Seasons



Foodie photos/ Jacqueline Bizan

Owner Mark Zecher and Executive Chef Rob Flaherty are the power duo behind the Honu Kitchen & Cocktail experience.



This cocktail paddle boasts four Honu signature cocktails. Pictured is the Absolut Pear Martini, the Harvest Moon Old Fashioned, seasonal sangria, and Pumpkin Cider, made with in-house pumpkin-infused vodka.

a rice wonton. Chef Rob Flaherty roasts the fat out of the duck, adding a crispy texture to the skin and brings the dish full circle.

The autumn entrée that will keep us coming back was the Seared Salmon (\$25), offered on the “large plate” portion of the menu, made with sautéed Swiss chard, navy beans and drizzled with grain mustard cream. It takes a lot to transform a salmon dish into something memorable, and Honu Kitchen does just that.

Chef Flaherty continued to up the large-plate ante with the last course of the meal, the tender Pecan Pork (\$25). Plated with deliciously diced sweet potato hash, which screams fall, and a Kentucky bour-

bon reduction, the pork dish was easy to cut into, and once we started cutting, Honu gave us no reason to stop — until it was time for dessert.

Bringing the season full circle, the Pumpkin Crème Brûlée is unlike anything we’ve ever tried before. Honu perfects the art of pumpkin infusion, infusing the already savory custard with the fall favorite. And, devouring it on site, the cherry walnut bread pudding is a winner.

The seasonal autumn menu kicked off at the end of September, and is available until Thanksgiving.



The seared salmon entrée, smothered in a grain mustard cream sauced and served with sautéed Swiss chard and navy beans, is wholesome and well seasoned.

Honu Kitchen & Cocktails

363 New York Ave.,
Huntington village
631-421-6900
www.honukitchen.com

Cuisine: Seasonal, Continental
Price: Moderate to Expensive
Atmosphere: Trendy and intimate
Hours: Tuesday-Thursday: 5pm-10pm; Friday & Saturday: 5pm-12am; Sunday: 4pm-9pm.