

February 7 – February 14, 2008



## New Honu Makes A Dazzling Debut

By Leah & Alesa

A new Honu has made its debut. After a three-week, mid-summer hiatus, the restaurant/nightclub formerly known as Blue Honu has reopened with a new menu, new décor and a new attitude. They even have a new name – sort of. It's now just Honu, Kitchen and Cocktails.

It's just more than five years since brothers John and David Tunney and partner John Reiger put themselves on the map with the opening of Blue Honu in a cavernous, brickwalled space on New York Avenue in Huntington village. An immediate hit, the restaurant's success carried well into the night and Honu became the anchor of the village's thriving night scene, and the centerpiece of a restaurant empire that includes Besitos in Huntington and Roslyn, American Burger Company locations in Huntington, Hicksville and Smithtown.

How do you top that kind of success? They're giving it their best shot with the just-opened Honu Kitchen and Cocktails, with a sophisticated new look, and a complete menu makeover. Early indications are the new Honu is as big a hit as its predecessor. Dining there on Honu's second day, there wasn't an empty table and it was business as usual at the bar.

The first sign of change at Honu is the most obvious – the new décor in browns and black. Lighting is softer, but eye catching, cast from elegant bronze and leaded glass chandeliers. The row of banquettes that line the dining room have been reupholstered elegantly in a black velvet on creamy white fabric, and bold graphic paintings – by third Tunney brother, Peter, a New York City artist – hang on the exposed brick walls.

While the basic structure remains unchanged, giving a very familiar feel to the room, nothing was untouched, said John Tunney. The waiting area near the bar – previously with a nautical theme – is now the front porch. The bar's soaring shelves – previously stocked only with clear bottles – now features a multi-colored array of backlit bottles that cast jewel tones. And the fireplace has been replaced with a unit that creates more mood and less heat so that diners seated closest are as comfortable as the rest of the room.

There are big changes in the menu as well. Honu has embraced a “small plate” concept that encourages diners to share, and to try more menu items. “They're bigger than an appetizer, but smaller than an entrée,” David Tunney explained.

Plates are placed at the center of the table, not in front of any one diner, and the typical two- to three-plate order is paced so that the surprises keep on coming. Appearance is of course a priority, and all that we tried were creatively presented on rectangular white plates.

The all new menu was secretly developed with executive chef Paul Miranda utilizing the kitchens at the Roslyn Besito. Two dozen choices designed to encourage new dining experiences range from \$9 to \$16, and depending on your appetite, two or three make a meal.

The creative combinations are so tempting as to make choosing difficult, and during our visit there, one table of four just went and ordered one of everything.

We were less ambitious, ordering representative beef and seafood plates. We somehow managed to save the best for first, opening with the figs, prosciutto, honey and goat cheese (\$12). Figs wrapped in prosciutto and topped with a dollop of warm goat cheese were an intriguing combination of salt and sweet. Crisped prosciutto, tender fig and smooth goat cheese made a playful contrast of textures.

Yellowfin tuna with Asian pear salad (\$14) energized our palates with an acidic brightness. Flavors of soy, rice vinegar and a pickle-y Bermuda onion were complemented by an orange aioli and wasabi and ginger sauce.

Skirt steak with Romesco and red onion (\$13) was a heavier, more substantial plate. Tender skirt steak strips atop an almond and cherry romelade are a rich

combination of flavors.

Our “must try” selection – Lobster with fire roasted corn (\$16) evoked a New England clambake, with chunks of tender lobster meat on a bed of roasted fresh corn. The combination warrants little additional flavoring and the peppery spice on the corn was just right. On special that night was a seafood plateau for two, combining oysters, lobster, crab and shrimp. We didn’t go for it but started to regret that decision when we saw the lavish iced platter headed to a table nearby. As it is, we’ll have to head back to try the rest of the menu, particularly the Quail with leeks and cauliflower puree (\$13); Mahi with shaved fennel and salsa verde (\$12); Beef tenderloin with maytag potato puree (\$14); and Head-on shrimp with garlic and chile.

Several side dishes (\$5), also suitable for sharing, include fries with sea salt and herbs; garlic edamame; artichokes with mint, chilled asparagus and asiago, and spatzle with fresh herbs.

Desserts should similarly be shared. We followed suggestions and tried a tummy warming peach and berry cobbler topped with cream, and a rich and dense, rich Chocolate and hazelnut cake... both gratifying.

The new Honu – like its predecessor – was packed on a Thursday night, but service was attentive without being inobtrusive. We’ll head back soon in the hopes of making it through the rest of the menu before the next dramatic makeover.

**Honu** Kitchen and Coktails 363 New York Avenue Huntington 631-421-6900

**Atmosphere:** Sophisticated Huntington nightspot

**Cuisine:** Creative international small plates encourage sharing

**Price Range:** Moderate to expensive, depending on appetite

**Hours:** Monday – Thursday 5-11 Friday and Saturday 5-12 Sunday 3-10