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## Small Plates, Big Taste

*AN UPSCALE TAKE ON TAPAS*

By: Ron Beigel

Some may wonder why John Tunney III took a successful restaurant like Huntington's Blue Honu and rejiggered the concept. But he did, and the new Honu Kitchen and Cocktails in Huntington morphed from Hawaiian to American Tapas.

The main room of this upscale meet-for-drinks scene is at once striking and comfortable, with the popular huge booths of the old days reupholstered. The long centerpiece bar has gotten better looking, too. Well-placed bulbs illuminate towering shelves of liquor bottles, arranged by color rather than variety.

A warm baguette in a bag is a cute sub for a breadbasket, joined by a saucer of butter with chopped garlic and served in a pool of olive oil. The menu is one long litany of choices-no appetizers, no entrees. You dictate the order of courses, or plates arrive in their own parade.

On our first visit we matched up a traditional Caesar Salad (\$6) with shaved parmesan, and Risotto Fritters (\$10) atop Pomodoro sauce. A riff on rice balls, they bored us before we finished them. Satisfying, dense veal and beef Meatballs (\$9) completed our little combo. Duck, Grits and Greens (\$14) is spectacular. Make sure you get a bit of each in every forkful. Halibut (\$14) is also wonderful- delicately prepared, atop crisp potato hash, flecked with bits of crab. All this goes down well with Concannon Pinot Noir (\$9) or Lumina Pinot Grigio (\$8), two of many interesting wines by the glass.

Chef Paul Miranda, a country club vet who has done time at Danube, among other kitchens, executes Executive Chef Matthew Lake's menu with expertise, and Tunney's wait staff is well trained. Quiz your waitress on ingredients or cooking methods and you'll receive a confident, informed answer. Sitting at a high-top table opposite the bar,

I hadn't noticed that my napkin had slipped off my lap until a busboy handed it to me, folded. (I would have had to jump off my chair to fetch it.)

Next time in, we sat upstairs to survey the scene, eye level with two different rows of chandeliers. We could have used one near our table, to read the menu and identify the food.

We paired Skirt Steak in Romesco and Red Onions (\$13) with a side of incredible Ribbon Fries (\$6). The steak tended to be overwhelmed by the thick, crunchy sauce, so we ate the components separately. The fries, crunchy chips really, were impossible to stop eating.

Short Rib Stuffed Piquillo Peppers (\$12) were an interesting take on chile relleno, the tender meat a natural filling. We coupled that with an extraordinary skillet of Mac 'n' Cheese Honu Style (\$11), browned on top with smoky taste throughout. Scallops and Truffled Celery Root Puree (\$15) were good, large, tender specimens, but certainly not \$5-each good. You do feel a price creep with these small plates that are just enough for two to nibble. However, the hungry couple's tab somehow ends up in the same vicinity as the usual appetizer/entrée/dessert route.

Our waitress convinced us to combine the sublime Dulce De Leche Gelato (\$8) with the seasonal Apple Cranberry Crisp (\$8). A cone of Cheesecake with Pine Nuts (\$8) was a more ordinary but sweet ending.

Honu Kitchen is easy to like, easy to do-a few plates, a glass of good wine and you have a DIY cocktail party.

Honu Kitchen and Cocktails  
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