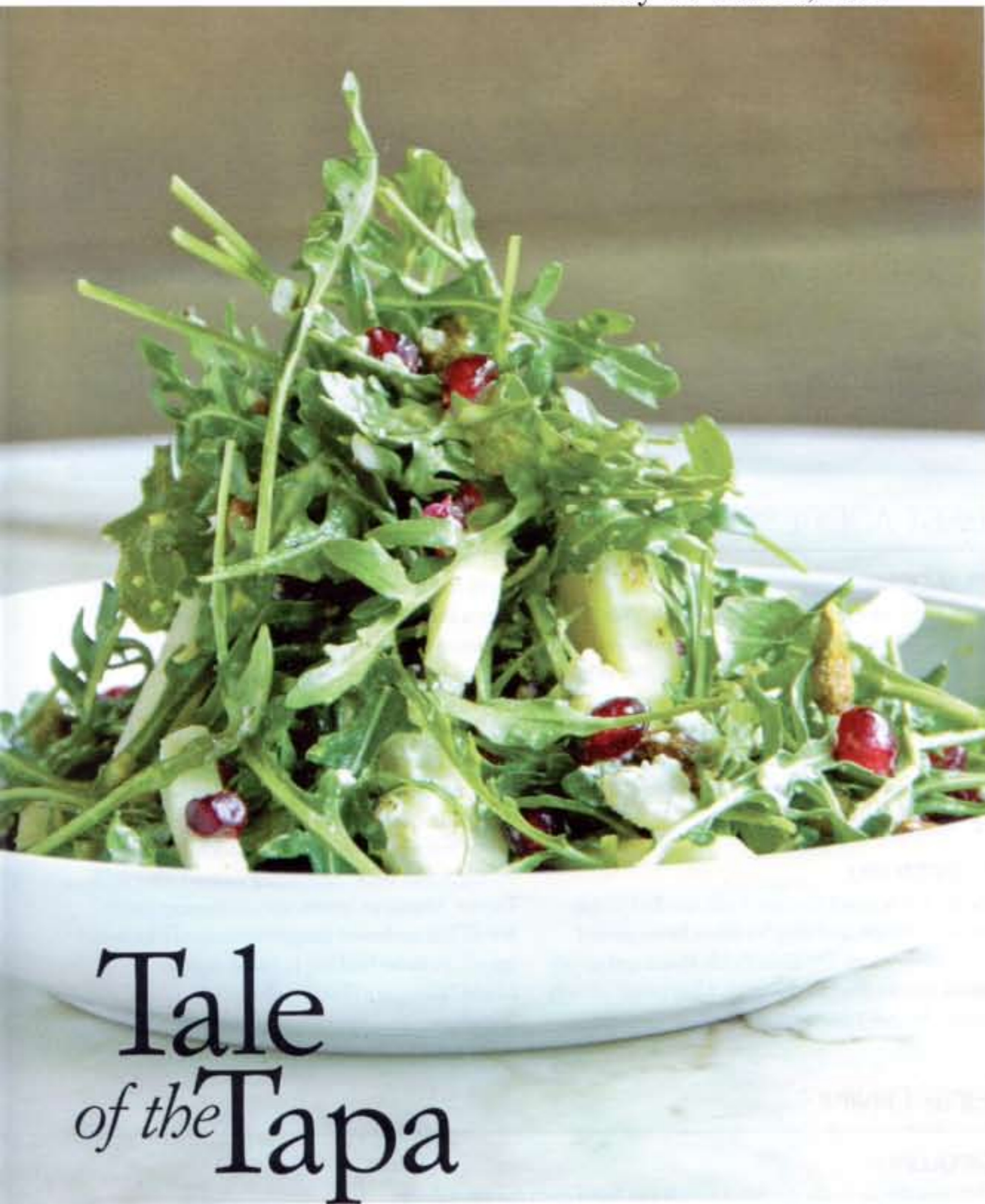


HAMPTONS

May 29- June 4, 2008



Tale of the Tapa

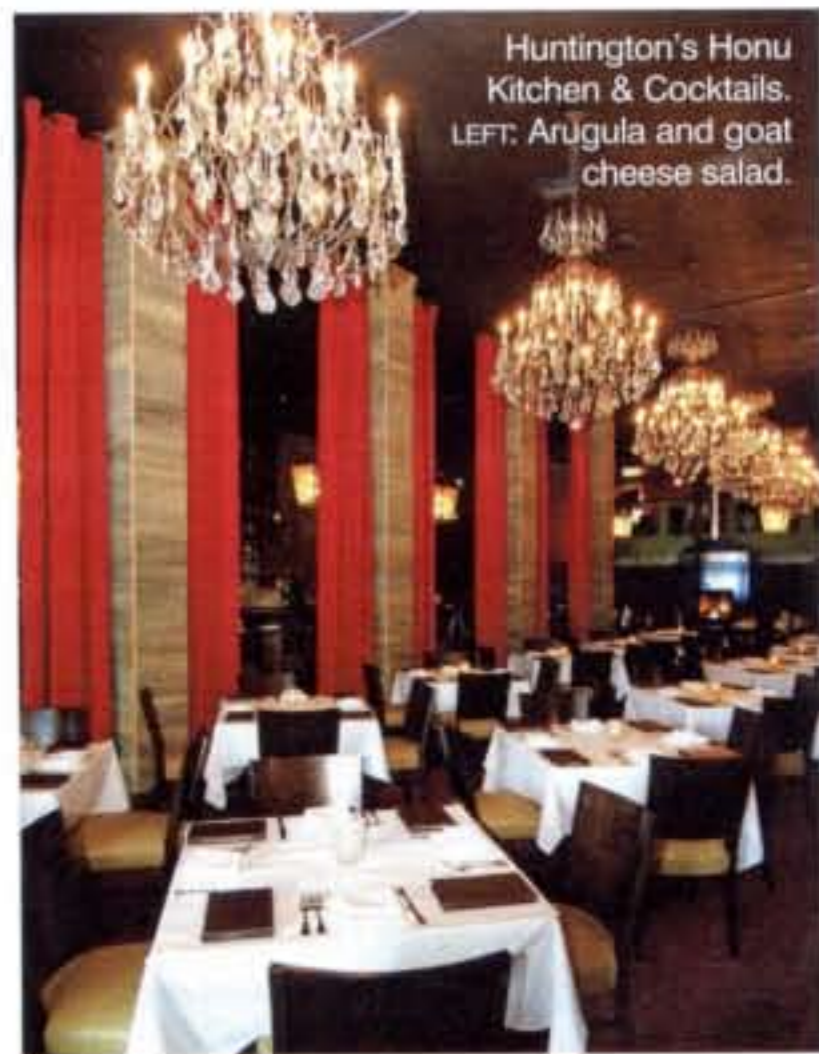
Huntington's Honu Kitchen & Cocktails proves that good things *do* come on small plates. by Michael B. Dougherty

LET'S GET SOMETHING STRAIGHT HERE: Small plates are great—in theory. I remember the tapas craze of the late nineties, during its moment in the sun. It was new, exotic... and not nearly enough food for what I paid. Unlike the stereotype associated with Asian food (full now, hungry later), there wasn't even a grace period of satiation—it just felt like someone stole food off my plate when I was in the restroom.

So upon entering Huntington's Honu Kitchen & Cocktails, I found myself feeling slightly dubious. Formally Blue Honu, the space has been remodeled and updated and is now redolent of a Stephen Starr venture. The high black ceiling and dark wood of the tables is offset by red velvet curtains that span the room's entire height. It's a very textual

space: exposed-brick walls, deep booths covered with a raised Moroccan print fabric, wrought-iron fixtures and chandeliers. Slick, for sure, but there's also a comforting rustic element that keeps the place from being too aesthetically chilling (the gorgeous black marble fireplace in the rear helps).

But then came those small plates. Our waiter amiably introduced the concept, tossing in the caveat about Honu's uncharacteristically generous proportions after noticing my raised eyebrows. We ordered a first round of dishes that included an arugula and goat cheese salad, pumpkin tortellini, and whipped potatoes. As we waited for the food to arrive, my guest commented that her pomegranate martini tasted unusually fresh; ditto for my bellini, which inspired me to order a bottle of Mionetto



Huntington's Honu Kitchen & Cocktails.
LEFT: Arugula and goat cheese salad.

prosecco for the table.

Side note, gentlemen: The crispness of a sparkling wine balances out the fatty (i.e. cheese, meat, butter) elements in your main dishes nicely, and your date will appreciate the bubbles.

When the portions arrived, they were indeed sized more like appetizers, so I stealthily placed the PowerBar back in my pocket. The tartness of our salad's fruit seeds and pistachios provided a refreshing entry point to the meal. We then eagerly moved to the tortellini. The pasta had a bouncy firmness to it, with a pleasant hint of browning, the creamy goat cheese blending with the nuttiness of the pumpkin. Intrigued by the risotto fritters, we found them to be lightly crunchy on the outside and quite filling, without being heavy. The potatoes were fluffy and appropriately buttery. By the end of this initial round there was a moment of debate as to whether a second course was even necessary—but only a moment.

Next up we sampled the "Honu style" mac and cheese and the artichokes. A house specialty, the mac and cheese came topped with a crown of toasted bacon, which suffused the dish with a smoky tone. The artichokes, prepared with garlic and pecorino, were a savory way to finish things off.

Although now quite full, my guest and I agreed that we'd be derelict in our duties if we passed on dessert. She tried the dulce de leche gelato and reported that it was silken and decadent, while I opted for a personal favorite, an apple cranberry crisp, and the ratio of cinnamon-to-ripe fruit and moist-to-crisp was ideal. Just as we were exiting, the bar area was filling up with a lively cocktail crowd.

If I could pen an open letter to all the "small plate" establishments in the city, I'd offer up Honu Kitchen as a prime example of the right way to execute the concept. Keep me comfortable, keep me interested, but most of all, keep me full. *Honu Kitchen & Cocktails, 363 New York Avenue, Huntington, 631-421-6900; honukitchen.com.*