



Restaurant Review

Dune Delights

Margate BYOB is 'nothing short of spellbinding'

by [Frank Gabriel](#)

Fresh off their fourth anniversary, Margate's endearing BYOB Dune has become, in our opinion, the most consistent overall restaurant in the Atlantic/Cape May region.

Having earned a reputation for sensational, intelligent seafood preparations, Chef Jason Hanin now seems to have sussed out each and every item on his menu and achieved a kitchen mastery that is nothing short of spellbinding.

Our recent weeknight meal was a showstopper from start to finish, accentuated by the extraordinarily painstaking attention to detail, which has become Dune's bailiwick and stock in trade.

Like a seasonal appetizer, pumpkin spice pappardelle (\$15) — thick, ribbony noodles laden with an autumnal cornucopia of ingredients.

Blended into the pasta were big, lardon-like cuts of sauteed proscuitto, salty, tangy pistachios, tiny, exotic Japanese mushrooms and verdant, crunchy soybeans, all lightly lacquered by a velvety pearl of a chestnut cream sauce.

Not only is this dish a marvel of creativity, it's one of the very finest bowls of pasta this chauvinistically Italian writer has ever sampled, anywhere. The supple, undeniably fresh pappardelle, a wider-than-fettucine product, absorbed and transferred each and every flavor, like an edible magic carpet. And while the pasta retained the orange gourd's unusually piquancy — so ubiquitous this time of year to have become a sort of culinary cliché — it was smartly only a character actor in this dramatic dish, not a lead player.

The amalgamation of elements was so heavenly that I repeatedly reached across the table to raid some from my dining partner's substantial portion.

Our other option was a decadent order of seared foie gras (\$17). The thumb-size portion of fatty liver had been proficiently handled, resulting in a caramelized wonder that was rich and buttery within. Beneath it a matching chunk of roasted peach complimented and balanced the duck's powerful presence. The plate itself was a marvel of coordination and arrangement. To the left side, a thin V-shaped smear of creamy white polenta staked out one corner, offset by four, wispy razor-thin slices of granny smith apple, plus orderly dices of tomato and asparagus bits. Beneath and about the softened peach, a tart blackberry gastrique — a trendy sauce not always well-executed — completed the plate with a series of dark, inky-purple droplets. Trust us, folks, fine dining just doesn't get much better than this.

Main dishes proved to be just as sterling. Mine, the Hawaiian Walu (\$28) brought a two-inch tall cut of bright white fish steak, which at first glance, looked like a sea scallop on steroids. Cooked confit style, slow and low, it retained a beautiful, rainbow sheen. The meat was impeccably clean, and definitely lived up to its alternate moniker, Butterfish.

Presented in a large bowl, it was plated atop a smoky-tasting duck confit and white bean stew. Although we found this savory mix delectable, its broth was a touch too strong from both salt and garlic, Hanin's only infinitesimal misstep of this magical meal.

Don't misread that last statement: this was still an exceptional entree. It's just with a kitchen this talented and ambitious, one can't help but hold them accountable to a higher standard than other places, the same way we come to anticipate near-perfection from a talented, star athlete.

Dorade (\$28), our second selection, was more straightforward: two sizeable grilled fillets, presented with the crispy skin side up. Like everything that finds its way out of Dune's kitchen, this was organized with thought and precision. Tender, miniature baby Brussels sprouts, warm and slightly browned, rode beneath with pancetta, Italy's take on bacon, generating a nutty, urbane flavor profile. Along for the ride was a toss of cranberries and pecans, plus a meltingly textured peach puree on the side as a sort of thickened sauce.

Desserts were the solid closing argument presented as testimony to Dune's elite status.

A Pot au Crème (\$7) filled a large cup with silky, deep, dark chocolate. Lightly whipped, this cocoa-rich dessert didn't shy away from playing to the essential bitter essence of the bean, then contrasting it with a smooth, mousse-like finish.

It's an astonishing version of a classic French dessert, clearly demonstrating Hanin's vast array of culinary weaponry.

The evening's cobbler, served in an individual crock, was filled with apples, pears, black and huckleberries (\$7). Offered piping hot, tiny rivulets of steam escaped from the crust as it was broken open. Earthy and delightfully simple.

Inside, the pairing of fruit and berry wasn't overly dulled by sugar. Their natural tartness remained forefront, closing this stellar meal with integrity.

To Chef Hanin and proprietor Nick Weinstein, congratulations. We can't wait to see what sophisticated fare you plan during the fifth year of your brilliant tenure.

Dune

Address: 9510 Ventnor Ave., Margate

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Details: Open in autumn Thurs-Sat. for dinner from 5pm, BYOB, credit cards accepted.

www.dunerestaurant.com