

Coastal Italian Fare Comes to Jack London Square with Lungomare

February 8, 2013



I've said before that Chop Bar is one of my all-time favorite restaurants in Oakland — especially when I don't want to stray too far from home to get a savory cheeseburger or a cast iron skillet brimming with mac-and-cheese. So when I heard that one of the co-owners, Chris Pastena, was branching out to open Lungomare in Jack London Square (along with partners Tom Henderson and Temoor Noor of Oakland's Grand Tavern), I couldn't wait to book a reservation.

Lungomare means "waterfront" or "promenade" in Italian, and the restaurant occupies the former space of Miss Pearl's Jam House & Lounge. Bay Area Bites editor Wendy Goodfriend and I stopped by yesterday evening for their opening night dinner service.

Via email, Pastena said the inspiration behind his new venture was a trip he took to Italy two years prior. He journeyed along the coast and felt that the climates and food were similar to the Bay Area and thus could source comparable ingredients locally.

The spacious 120-seat restaurant — with an additional 80 seats in the outdoor patio — is adjacent to the Waterfront Hotel. While its newly renovated interior has removed all traces of its Caribbean predecessor, it now has the generic, rather bland ambiance that one would expect to find in a hotel restaurant.







It's quite a different feel from the rustic, intimate atmosphere of Chop Bar, but Pastena is hoping to cater to both locals and tourists with this spot. "I enjoy Jack London Square as a business owner and resident and feel that the more we can expose people to this great area the better."



I kicked things off with the cocktail “Italian 75,” devised by bar manager Paul Christensen formerly of [Haven](#): Col di Rocca prosecco, [Cocchi Americano](#), lemoncello and kumquat bitters (\$9). It was a rather unmemorable cocktail that was neither sweet nor dry and tasted only faintly of the lemoncello.

Housemade fountain sodas, spirits, wines from Italy, Portugal and Argentina as well as an assortment of international beers round out the restaurant’s liquid offerings — including special custom beers made by the neighboring [Linden Street Brewery](#).

Chef Craig DiFonzo, previously of the now-shuttered Cantinetta Piero, researched Italian cooking techniques and has filled the menu with dishes that evoke Tuscany and Liguria: handmade pasta, seafood and shellfish, cured meats and wood-fired pizzas.





The fluke crudo accompanied with grapefruit and mint (\$8) was by far the most flavorful course we sampled over the course of our meal. Dressed in a rich, fruity olive oil and a sprinkling of sea salt, the simple dish shone on the merits of its tasty ingredients.



The mussels with chickpeas and Tuscan kale served in a tomato broth seasoned with Calabrian chili, however, lacked the freshness of our appetizer (\$11). The chickpeas were undercooked and didn't pair well with the shellfish; we left most of them behind in the bowl as we made our way through the mussels. We weren't tempted to sop up the broth with the buttered toast, which is usually one of the highlights of ordering this dish.



The lamb meatball pizza with sweet peppers, Calabrian chili, fresh mozzarella and goat cheese (which was omitted from the description on the menu) was far too salty, but the light and airy crust was cooked to perfection (\$14).





I moved onto my next drink, the “Italian Job,” mixed with Rittenhouse rye, [Christina Nocino](#), coffee [falernum](#) and chocolate bitters (\$11). It was the complete opposite of my first cocktail; heavy on the rye, I couldn’t discern between the different notes of walnut, chocolate and coffee — it was a muddled and overpowering drink.



A pillowy-soft gnocchi, surrounded by a rich pork cheek ragu, golden raisins and pine nuts was a bit pricey (\$16) for the size of the serving but was buttery and delicious.



The big disappointment of the night was our main entree, the Berkshire porchetta with caramelized sunchokes, farro and chard (\$22). I consider [Roli Roti's juicy version with an abundance of crispy skin](#) to be the gold standard of locally-produced porchetta. Lungomare's version was slightly dry, uniform in taste and texture and underwhelming in flavor.



The dessert selection was a typical array of Italian confections — cheesecake, apple tart or panna cotta — so we chose the chocolate mousse-like budino with salted caramel and sea salt (\$8). It was perfectly adequate, though certainly not a stellar conclusion to our meal.



Throughout the evening, the smooth sounds of Dean Martin crooned from the overhead speakers. We were expecting a live performance from [Karyn Paige](#) and the Scoundrels, but they were nowhere to be seen; perhaps they'll make an appearance during the remainder of the opening weekend festivities.

While our first impressions of Lungomare are that the food — as well as the service, which alternated between attentive and spotty — will continue to evolve over time as they find the flow of their new locale. I hope it eventually equals the steadfast charm of Chop Bar and becomes a mainstay of the Jack London Square culinary scene.

And Lungomare is only the first of several projects on Pastena's plate; two other places are in the works in the next two years: Tribune Tavern will open in the ground floor of the Tribune Tower this spring, and he plans to open a fine-dining Mexican restaurant in the Uptown neighborhood in 2014.

Lungomare

Address: [Map](#)

One Broadway

Oakland, CA

Ph: 510-444-7171

Schedule:

Lungomare Grand Opening Weekend Schedule

Friday, February 8th: dinner, 5:30–11:00 PM; lounge 5:30PM–1:30AM

Saturday, February 9th: dinner, 5:30–11:00 PM; lounge 5:30PM–1:30AM

Sunday, February 10th: dinner, 5:30–10:00 PM

Reservations are recommended and can be made online, as the restaurant will have limited seating for the opening weekend.

Regular hours begin Monday, Feb. 11, serving breakfast (in the cafe), lunch and dinner seven days a week.

Monday--Thursday:

Lunch 11am--3pm; Mid-Day 3pm--5:30pm; Dinner 5:30pm--10pm

Thurs – Sat 11am to 11pm

Friday: same hours, dinner until 11pm

Saturday & Sunday: Brunch 8am--3pm; Mid--Day 3pm--5:30pm

Saturday dinner 5:30pm--11pm; Sunday dinner: 5:30pm--10pm

Cafe Hours:

Monday--Friday, 7am--2pm;

Saturday & Sunday, 8am--3pm

Facebook: [Lungomare](#)

Twitter: [@LungomareOakJLS](#)

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