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More than pub food at Petaluma's Pub Republic





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Because ongoing success in the restaurant business is difficult to achieve, it is refreshing to recognize a place like Petaluma's Pub Republic, a shining star of excellence from the moment it opened its doors just over five years ago. It is not a surprise the proprietors, Jory Bergman and Mark Edwards, have a great deal of restaurant and other business experience.

In addition to experience, they have a passion for what they do, and a genuine interest in improving it each day. Mark, who is responsible for the culinary team, remarked to me that every time he improves one of their popular menu items, it just sells even more. I like that he is not afraid to tweak something if he thinks he can make it better.

Jory runs the front of the house, and she takes great care in training her servers to give diners informed and effective service, geared toward the time guests have to spend. She is a great communicator as well.

Generally "pub" or even "gastropub" style restaurants are not my first choice when deciding where to dine, but this is much more of a restaurant than a pub. The overall décor, with high ceilings and clean lines feels upscale but not pretentious. It is bright, light and airy, where the term "pub" always invokes a dark, cozy paneled room.

Pub Republic features several spaces to dine; a quieter dining area, the high- energy bar area, and the quiet patio that one friend called one of the best-kept secrets in Petaluma. Located at the corner of Lakeville Highway and South McDowell Boulevard, there is parking available in this suburban-style strip mall.

The menu features some really nice sharable appetizers. One of my favorites was the avocado hummus (\$12) accurately described on the menu as avocado hummus purée, crushed pistachios, roasted shishito peppers, extra-virgin olive oil, citrus salt and rustic sourdough wheat toast. This is the kind of dish where the combination of the unique parts comes together in a dish that is greater than the sum of those parts.

We also tried the vodka lemon cured salmon crostini (\$12.50) of house-cured salmon, creamy goat cheese, capers, preserved lemon, shaved red onion. Served on grilled rustic wheat crostini, served with a small salad, this would also be a nice light entrée for one.

The blue cheese and bacon burger sliders (\$12) Pt. Reyes Blue Cheese, caramelized onions, bacon, and roasted garlic aioli, are listed as a share plate. They served three good-sized sliders, so if you were sharing you could cut each one in half and serve six appetizer portions, or you could keep them all for yourself and make them into a meal which is what one of our friends did.

Another "share" plate we tried, albeit ordered as a main, was the ahi tuna poke tacos (\$12.50). The ginger-sesame-soy marinated ahi tuna was served in crispy wonton skins with avocado wasabi mousse, and they were very tasty.

Over several visits we tried the arugula pistachio salad (half \$10), which included mixed greens, avocado, fresh strawberries, pickled fennel, toasted pistachios and creamy balsamic dressing. We also ate the Napa crunch salad (half \$10) consisting of shaved Napa cabbage, baby kale, purple cabbage, candied almonds, cilantro and a topping of crispy Wonton strips. We asked for the delicious cilantro lime yogurt dressing on the side, which was perfect for dipping the added grilled ahi tuna (\$9). Both half-size portions were very generous, and I cannot imagine being able to eat a full-sized portion.



One of our diners tried the iceberg wedge salad (\$11.50) with crumbled bacon, cherry tomatoes, shaved red onion and house-made Pt. Reyes Blue Cheese dressing. He added the grass-fed grilled steak (\$6), which was perfectly cooked to medium rare as ordered. This meal salad filled up an active teen boy just perfectly.

Entrees we tried included the stout braised boneless beef short ribs (\$24) seasonal vegetable, crispy onions, whole grain mustard sauce and mashed potatoes; the Guinness braised beef shepherd's pie included chopped brussels sprouts, carrots, peas and onions baked under a blanket of whipped mashed potatoes and three cheeses. A member of our party selected the option of the half order served with a mixed green salad (\$13.50) and it was plenty.

The brick chicken and brussels sprout-bacon hash (\$22) was a huge free range boneless half chicken cooked under a weight to make the skin nice and browned, and the flesh very moist. The accompanying brussels sprouts, thick cut bacon, and fingerling potato hash, and the white wine lemon shallot sauce finished the plate off nicely. When I spoke with Chef Mark after we dined there, he told me that the most popular entrees were the short ribs, shepherd's pie and the brick chicken, which turns out to be exactly what our party of eight ordered.

My husband, ever the burger fanatic, ordered the Wine Country Cowgirl burger (\$17) a full 8-ounce burger, perfectly cooked, and served with Cowgirl Creamery Mt. Tam Triple Cream Cheese, roasted garlic, bacon onion jam, arugula and balsamic reduction on a huge soft bun. Every part of this special sandwich was perfection served with a huge portion of truffle fries and aioli for dipping, it was enormous.

After all this food you would not think we had room for dessert, but we couldn't leave with at least trying something, so we ordered a salted caramel gelato, and the star of the dessert menu in our opinion, the chocolate

peanut butter mousse cake. Served on top of a chocolate brownie, the peanut butter mousse struck just the right notes of peanutty, creamy, and airy without being too sticky or cloying. Finished with some chocolate sauce and something chocolaty and crunchy, it is a dessert worth making the trip to Pub Republic to eat, so save room.

We tried some of their wines by the glass, and beers on tap while we dined there, and were happy with all the choices. We were a bit sad to learn later that they offered beer-tasting flights — if we had paid closer attention to the menu we would have definitely tried out one of those.

We also learned that they have a happy hour offered Monday through Friday from 3 to 6 p.m. in the bar, with \$5 glasses of wine, local Lagunitas beers for only \$3, and the beer flights for \$4, as well as very special pricing on bar nibbles and snacks, we will definitely be back. Hopefully Jory will see to adding the happy hour menu to their otherwise excellent website.

We are so happy to have finally tried Pub Republic, and we cannot wait to go back. If you haven't been, or if it has been awhile, you should visit this local Petaluma gem.

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