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ENTERTAINMENT, DINING, ARTS & CULTURE, BUSINESS, EVENTS, MUSIC, AND MORE

✧ DOWNTOWN DINING ✧

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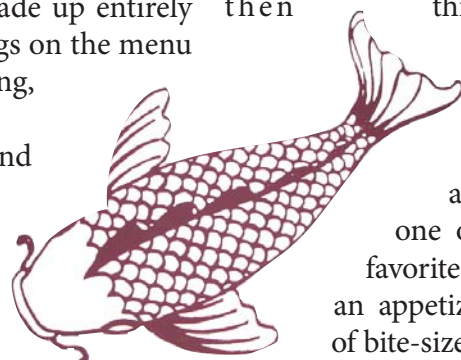
Buku may look familiar, but don't be fooled. Sure, it still looks a lot like Fins, William D'Auvray's award-winning fine-dining restaurant that was previously in the space, with the water wall, sconce lighting and luxurious upholstered seating, but once you see the new artwork on the walls, including street vendor photos and escaped koi fish painted by Adam Peele, smell the different aromas coming from the kitchen and hear the live music coming from the newly-built stage, you know buku is decidedly not formal fine dining. What it is, though, is a whirlwind tour of the world—sans jet lag.

Buku is the brain child of Chef William D'Auvray, Tony Hopkins and Sean Degnan. Their idea was "to have a local restaurant that tells a global story." With a world music soundtrack and D'Auvray's focus on time-honored global street foods with an upscale twist, buku does just that. And for those of you who were fans of Fins, don't worry; D'Auvray's signature west coast Asian-style dishes fit right in and are still served at buku.



The first part of D'Auvray's menu is broken down into hot pots and soups, breads, chilled salads, sauces and chutneys, dumplings and rolls, and vegetarian and grains. The second part is divided into raw and almost raw, sustainable seafood, meats, and "in off the street," which is made up entirely of entrees. All of the other groupings on the menu are smaller plates designed for mixing, matching and sharing.

Greeted and seated with a warm and friendly smile, we were promptly offered drinks from the diverse beverage menu. Consisting of well-priced wines (30 under \$30, many offered by the glass),



local and far flung beers and chef-inspired cocktails, there was certainly no shortage of choices.

Our dinner began with the Hot Pot (\$10) and Paneer (\$6). The Hot Pot alone would easily feed three to four people. The delightful and luscious soup—flavored with coconut milk, just the right amount of red curry, Thai basil, and galanga root (Thailand's answer to ginger)—was rich, creamy and filled with braised chicken and mushrooms. The Paneer (an Indian non-melting, farmers' cheese that is lacto-vegetarian) was seared to a beautiful golden brown and served with caramelized onions, stir-fried kale, and cardamom, an extremely flavorful Indian spice mixed into a warm and aromatic glaze. It was not only a welcome change from the ubiquitous tofu, but a dish that I will now seek out.

The Pierogies (\$7) and Vietnamese Crispy Crêpes (\$7.50) followed. The potsticker-like pierogies were stuffed with beer-braised chicken and winter squash, sautéed in brown butter and garnished with toasted peanuts. The light and crispy crêpe, served with an herb salad, was more than enough for two. It was filled with shrimp, shiitake mushrooms, Thai

basil, and bean sprouts. It was simply sublime.

Our third course brought us Beef Tataki (\$8) and Hawaiian Yellowtail Poke (pronounced "po-keh") (\$8). Tataki is a Japanese dish in which beef is seared on the outside but very rare on the inside, then

thinly sliced and sauced with a citrusy dressing. Here, the beef is sirloin, and it's served cold with wasabi-dressed baby arugula, crispy onions and ponzu sauce. This classic was one of our publisher Crash Gregg's favorites of the evening. Poke, usually an appetizer or snack, generally consists of bite-sized pieces of raw, fresh fish mixed

with a seaweed and nut relish. However, all types of seafood, herbs, spices, nuts, marinades, fruits, vegetables, or seasonings can also be used. At buku, D'Auvray uses Hawaiian Yellowtail Tuna and serves it as a cross between tuna tartar and ceviche. He mixes the diced tuna with cashews, chives, wasabi, sweet soy sauce, and lime juice and serves it with plantain chips and julienne cucumber.

For dessert, we enjoyed the Trilogy of Crème Brûlées (\$8) and Tiramisu (\$8). The brûlées came in three elegant ramekins: ginger, vanilla bean and dark chocolate. The tiramisu was layered parfait-style with Kaluha and honey-doused lady fingers, creamy and light mascarpone and chocolate shavings. It was served with an ethereal espresso crème anglaise sauce on

the side.

So, don't lament over the loss of Fins. Instead, embrace the mouth-watering, exotic journey that is buku. And with a lot of items priced under \$10, your wallet will be as pleased as your palate.



Brian is a culinary instructor, food writer and personal chef. His business, Love at First Bite, specializes in private cooking classes and intimate dinners. For more information, please visit Brian at www.loveatfirstbite.net