

# alt

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# dining out

## Epicurious Eating: Crescent Heights Kitchen and Lounge

Such great 'Heights'

BY FRANK SABATINI JR.

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Consider it a miracle if you're wandering the streets of Downtown for a nice meal *outside* of the Gaslamp District and then miraculously happen upon Crescent Heights without any pointers.



Crescent Heights Kitchen and Lounge

The restaurant, a new venture by Wolfgang Puck protégé David McIntyre and his wife Mariah, is oddly concealed on the ground level of a 23-story office structure at the tail end of west Broadway where commercial activity dies off. There are no front windows looking into the restaurant. And if signage exists, my companion and I missed it, relying instead on a numbered address crowning tall glass doors that lead into the building's artfully designed lobby.

From inside, you hang left to enter the restaurant's stylish domain, an airy layout sporting clean lines and abundant shades of brown. A semi open kitchen and welcoming bar lounge occupies one end. Opposite that is a spacious, softly lit dining area filled with tables, banquettes and a few exceptionally deep booths. Easeful and modern, Crescent Heights is refreshingly removed from Downtown's clamorous dining scene just several blocks away, though it was surprisingly full on the Tuesday evening we visited.

Two masterfully conceived cocktails proved a promising introduction to our dinner. My companion's "yuzu crush" made with Casa Nobile tequila and yuzu juice titillated the palate with the addition of ginger, lemongrass and fresh squeezed lime. I opted for a caipirinha, a Brazilian favorite that normally runs high on lime. This recipe breaks convention with strawberry and basil to further camouflage its base of high-alcohol sugarcane liquor.

The dinner menu begins with a selection of outsourced charcuterie and artisan cheeses, allowing you to craft your own "board." Among our choices was Spanish, dry-cured chorizo that I wished was spicier. Ditto for the framani piccante, a California style pork chorizo that actually tasted milder in comparison to the peppercorn-infused "gentile" version we combined it with.

We paired the meats with Irish cashel blue cheese revealing medium strength and utmost creaminess. Another curd, Epoisses, named after the French village from which it originates, offered a delightfully pungent and silky rush of cow's milk that perfectly contrasted in texture a sampling of sturdy Italian pecorino. The plate included thoughtful accompaniments – apricot mash, homemade mustard and a tiny plop of glistening honeycomb that tasted as though it had been freshly scraped from the hive.

From the same menu category, titled "first," we encroached on ahi tuna tartare that escapes monotony thanks to jalapeno-ginger aioli pepping up the fresh, raw cubes of tuna. The Crescent Heights salad, however, was too conflicted for my taste – an anomaly compared to the streamlined beauty of everything else we ate here. In the mix were warm fingerling potatoes resembling in flavor German potato salad, plus savory confit bacon, tangy mustard vinaigrette and a tepid poached egg topping it all off. Way busy.

Our entrees were beautifully executed, returning us to McIntyre's magical ability for allowing flavors to stand on their own. His sautéed wild bass, for example, is enlivened with sauce made of shallots, butter and preserved lemon. The sauce cleverly amplifies the normally feeble flavor of bass without transforming it. In orbit were baby carrots, Jerusalem artichokes and pearl onions forming a tasty medley that would make for an outstanding vegetarian dish on its own.

My companion's roasted Kurobuta pork rack from Idaho's Snake River Farms rivaled all others I've encountered. McIntyre air cures the pork in-house for about four days, which imparts a slight briny essence to the flesh. The ultra-tender meat is further complimented by homey jus containing whispers of sage and horseradish.

A la carte side dishes continued carrying the bright torch, with potato-leek gratin ranking as our favorite. The gratin is baked in milk, cream and butter – not in the pasty roux that is the bane of other recipes. A duxelle of sautéed mushrooms were also top quality, as were ricotta-herb gnocci tossed in a teasing measure of flavorful Bolognese sauce.

The restaurant's wine program is overseen by a young, handsome expert pursuing his advanced sommelier certificate. Bottle selections far outnumber wines by the glass, but in either case, the selection features global labels and mature vintages. Desserts, on the other hand, fall under the direction of pastry chef Regan Briggs, who brings her confectionary know-how to the house from Four Seasons in Los Angeles. All told, Crescent Heights has a whiz-bang team in place. And you'll feel lucky when you find it.

## Crescent Heights Kitchen and Lounge

655 W. Broadway, Downtown; 619-450-6450; Hours: Lunch: 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, Dinner: 5:30 to 10 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Closed on Sundays.

Service   
Atmosphere   
Food Quality   
Cleanliness   
Price Range: \$\$-\$\$\$

: outstanding  
: good  
: fair  
: poor  
\$: inexpensive  
\$\$: moderate  
\$\$\$: expensive