

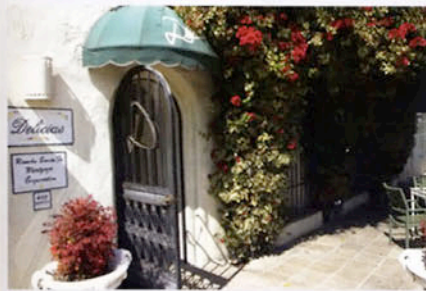
BY DREW CLAYTON



6106 Paseo Delicias
Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067
858.756.8000
Open Sun.-Thu. 5:30-9 p.m.
Fri.-Sat 5:30-10 p.m.

Delicias

Deep in the rich recesses of Rancho Santa Fe hides a delicious secret. For 14 years, Delicias has purposely kept a low, yet revered, profile. Most patrons are residents of the prestigious locale. The ambiance is an eclectic milieu of hand-painted French tiles framing the exposition kitchen, medieval tapestries and Caribbean-esque furniture, in a building of Southwest architecture with Sinatra playing overhead. There is also patio dining out front, and more in a shaded



courtyard with a large fireplace.

If the interior is eclectic, the menu is even more so. Executive Chef Barry Layne, who has been in the business for almost 20 of his 34 years, including time at Escondido's 150 Grand Cafe, uses experience, organic ingredients and a lot of imagination to revamp the menu monthly to keep with current food trends, seasonal ingredients and in his own words, "to keep from getting bored." He must be having a lot of fun, because he treated us to an array of items that bedazzled our eyes and palates.

I had never tried foie gras before, but after Layne's version, I am evangelical about it. He pan sears the enriched goose liver to leave a crispy outside and smooth, semi-liquid inside, and towers it with pears and a waffle. The truly astounding part of the dish is a scoop of peach sorbet. The result is a world of harmonizing contrasts. The ice crystals accent the melted foie gras interior as the sorbet and pears' sweetness plays against a savory caramelized balsamic zinfandel reduction. Dick, the maitre d', paired an incredible sauterne dessert wine with the appetizer for us, an unexpectedly inspired choice.

We also tried crawfish and cream cheese croquettes, with a panko-like crispy flaked exterior. The house-made sweet-and-sour plum sauce was a wonderful side treatment. Mascarpone cheese, shitake mushrooms and dried cherries were combined in one of the most unique, rich egg rolls ever to grace a menu.

Delicias' roasted sea bass was a great mix of flavors. Morel mushrooms seasoned au jus sauce base, and the oven-roasted roma tomatoes absorbed the essences of the fish and other ingredients. The dish's full-bodied flavor proved that Merlot can go quite well with fish, under the right circumstances. Our other entrée was a tender rack of lamb. Mint and chili oils drizzled around the plate added a touch of color and are illustrations of the kitchen's artful presentation. The lamb's flavor stood on its own, but was strengthened by accompanying candied dates and apricots.

The entire restaurant can be reserved for special occasions or you can have an off-premises event catered. The chef also organizes cooking classes to share his epicurean secrets.

