

RESTAURANTS



DELPHINE: A seafood tower, delivered by Brent Berkowitz, left, and chef Sascha Lyon, is the *small* platter.

THE REVIEW

Like being on the Riviera

Sunny Mediterranean fare and moderate prices — it's a little of the South of France in Hollywood.

S. IRENE VIRBILA
RESTAURANT CRITIC

Not going to catch the Cannes film festival this year? Don't cry. You can still vump it up at the smart new Delphine, the W Hollywood's ode to the Riviera at Hollywood and Vine. In the bar, vintage black and white photos of the grand hotels along Cannes' Boulevard de la Croisette set the scene. The sidewalk outside the glass doors, facing the Pantages and just steps from the Metro station, is not a bad stand-in for Cannes' famous seaside promenade and its gawking crowds.

Look, there's a Josephine Baker look-alike swanning through the dining room. And yes, that is a real black fox boa slung over one shoulder.

Delphine has captivating looks, a hard-working staff and French Mediterranean food that has a little something for everyone. It's not Cannes — or even Café Boulud or Bouchon — but it's a bright new star on Hollywood Boulevard.

That Baker look-alike is not the only eye candy around. We can't help watching the giant seafood platters progress across the room. Two servers in cinch-waisted black vests and long aprons ferry the broad aluminum platters filled with ice and covered with chilled seafood. The two tiers are set up on a rack, with a trio of sauces, bread and butter.

That's the *petit*, our server whispers, eyebrow raised — as opposed to the *grand*, which is three tiers and roughly double the price. All around us, at long tables peopled with pretty women in clothes ripped right out of the pages of *W* or *Polyvore.com*, guests are nibbling at pearlescent Kumamoto oysters, fat white shrimp and messier crab claws. It's perfect girl food: You can look busy even when you're not eating much.

Although Delphine is set in the heart of Hollywood, Mark Zeff of New York's Zeff Design has given the place an easy, beachy vibe with a vaulted wood ceiling, blue and white patterned tile

Delphine at the W Hollywood ★★



SAUCY: Braised lamb shoulder *sofregit*.

LOCATION
6250 Hollywood Blvd. (at Vine), Los Angeles; (323) 798.1355; www.restaurantdelphine.com.

PRICE
Dinner antipasti, \$6 to \$16; hors d'oeuvres, \$7 to \$14; pizzas, \$12 to \$15; sandwiches and salads, \$12 to \$15; main courses, \$17 to \$36; cheese plate, \$15; desserts, \$9. Seafood platters, \$58 and \$98. Corkage fee, \$15.

DETAILS
Open for breakfast from 6:30 to 11 a.m.; for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and for dinner from 5 to 10:30 p.m. Sundays through Wednesdays and 5 p.m. to midnight Thursdays through Saturdays. Full bar. Valet parking, \$5 for the first 2 1/2 hours before 5 p.m. with validation, \$7 after 4 p.m. Note that a 15% service charge is added to each guest check regardless of the size of the party.

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Its close-up

Go online to see more photos of Delphine, the French Mediterranean spot at W Hollywood.

floor, and enormous wood-framed oval mirrors that reflect the scene back on itself. There's a handful of curvaceous booths and for the tables, white wicker armchairs. The space is roomy. And there almost always seems to be some group celebrating a birthday or some special occasion. A silvered bookcase lines one wall, but the only thing anybody's

reading is the menu.

The food from chef Sascha Lyon is updated French Mediterranean bistro fare. And it's very competent for a venue this big and this new. Like Bouchon, Thomas Keller's Beverly Hills bistro, the menu is pretty much fixed, printed on placemat-sized paper and supplemented by a few specials each night.

Oysters? Check. Beautiful Kumamotos or Malpeques that slip out of their shells with ease.

Escargots? Check. These are plump and chewy, with plenty of garlic-parsley sauce and butter.

Steak *au potiro*? Delphine has an excellent one, with a sharp blast of cracked black peppercorns in a silky reduction.

Moules *frites*? Ditto. A dash of Pernod goes into the mingled juices, perfuming the dish with its distinct anise taste.

And, of course, there is a *croque monsieur*, or *madame*, if you prefer. Super-sized, the pink ham and Gruyere sandwich is slathered in béchamel, a real trencherman's special, maybe better to share. *Madame* is crowned with a fried egg.

Lyon, who worked at Daniel, Balthazar and Patis in New York, mixes it up with his hors d'oeuvres. He does a rollicking, garlicky *brandade de morue* — salt cod puree mixed with potatoes, ready to be scooped up onto little toasts. But also a lovely *fritto misto* of shrimp, squid, mussels, clams and lemon slices.

Pizzas are more like flatbreads with various toppings. The *quatre fromages* blanketed in four cheeses garnished with tomato and basil is satisfying. Pastas are gutsy and delicious, especially a classic *pennette alla vodka*.

Lyon breaks out with striped bass in *aigo bouido*, a flavorful fish in a light garlic broth dotted with celery and perfumed with orange zest in the Provençal style. Braised lamb shoulder *sofregit* is accompanied by creamy polenta and stewed peppers. Fish and chips, made with Atlantic cod, comes with tartar sauce and pickled onions. And, incidentally, there's one of the best mac 'n' cheeses around, a perfect balance of cheese to cream and pasta.

Bouillabaisse (Friday night's special dish — what's more South of France than that?) comes in an adorable enameled pot, a meal in it-

self. Without scrappy Mediterranean fish, it's not possible to replicate the true taste of bouillabaisse here, but this is one of the better versions around, a tomato-based seafood soup delicious in its own right.

The restaurant offers basic wines by the glass or reasonably priced carafes, but to drink something more interesting, you'll have to look over the wine list. The good news is that there's plenty of choice in the \$50-and-under range, including a fine Pinot Blanc "Cuvée d'Amours" from Hugel in Alsace and a Domaine Chandon Pinot Noir, both less than \$50. You can spend much more, of course, on well-known California or Bordeaux labels.

Desserts are simple and direct, especially the *profiteroles* with vanilla bean ice cream and a dark chocolate sauce. Apple hazelnut *crostada* is a variation on the apple-ple-with-cheddar idea, here substituting goat cheese for the cheddar (with less success).

For *affogato* fans, Delphine offers a French version, espresso and chocolate sauce poured over vanilla ice cream buried under so much sweet frilly whipped cream it's hard to get at the ice cream.

And that seafood platter? It's incredibly generous — "le petit Delphine" is almost too generous for two, especially if you plan on eating anything else. It's replete with oysters, steamed mussels, clams, fat shrimp, sea snails to eat with a pin and larger *whelks*, and includes a terrific scallop *ceviche* on the half shell and Dungeness crab. It's not the best platter in town, but it's definitely the biggest bang for the buck.

The folks behind Sushi Roku, Katana and the Boa Steakhouses have produced Delphine as a hip hotel restaurant, but with prices moderate enough that guests don't feel hustled. You don't have to be a big spender to have breakfast, lunch or dinner here. I can imagine dropping in for a salad or a *croque monsieur* or an *omelette aux fines herbes* and stopping at that. The service is capable and pleasant. A trio of hostesses in black call out a hello when you walk in and goodbye when you leave.

Remember the days when *hauteur* and rudeness ruled at the restaurant of the moment? No more.

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THE FIND

Moqueca, the spirit of coastal Brazil

Brazilian cuisine that's focused on seafood rather than beef comes to Channel Islands Harbor.

LINDA BURUM

The bartender at Moqueca is mixing up flamingo-pink Copacabanas. Brazilian *caipirinha* cocktails are flowing and there's plenty of Xingu, the dark-as-ink Brazilian beer, being poured. Through the windows of the second-story dining room you can look out over Oxnard's Channel Islands Harbor.

It's not quite the frenzied Carnival spirit of Rio, but it's easy to imagine that you're partying at a Brazilian seaside resort. Most diners, though, aren't here for the view. They've come for the *moquecas* Capixabas, the spicy, bubbling fish and seafood stews, a regional specialty of Espirito Santo, the tiny Brazilian state along the country's southeastern coast.

Each *moqueca* comes to the table in a rustic, coal-black cooking pot of the same name. Gleaming white lobster tails, shrimp or chunks of fish poke out from under the fire-engine-red potage.

Owner Maria-Gloria Sarcinelli imports the *moqueca* pots from her home city, Vitória, in Espirito Santo, where women called *paneleiras* make them from black clay and mangrove tree sap according to an ancient Indian formula. The pots seemingly have a mystical power to transform the foods' own juices into a flavor-packed sauce — lime-marinated seafood mixed with fresh tomato, olive oil and seasonings.

Of eight *moquecas* available as entrées, the most luxurious would be the popular whole lobster tail and shrimp combination for \$36. More wallet-friendly are the *moquecas* with jumbo shrimp, fish fillets or cubes of shark meat. Indecisive diners appreciate the *moqueca mista de mariscos* that includes shrimp, octopus, squid, mussels and clams. There's even a *moqueca* for vegetarians made with plantains.

Designed for two, *moquecas* come accompanied with rice. If you ask, the server will bring the traditional side, *pirão*, a bowl of lightly thickened and seasoned fish soup.

But *moquecas* don't steal the entire show. An appetizer of scallops in their shells is baked under a *fine mist* of Parmesan. *Frito misto*, expertly fried fish, calamari and shrimp, make a fine textural contrast for the stews.

Complimentary bowls of *beringela*, a mellow eggplant spread, come with toasted French bread. And *malagueta*, Brazil's favorite pepper, is brought steeped in oil in tiny condiment bowls, giving chile-heads a chance to jack up the heat

Moqueca Restaurant



TO SHARE: Lobster tail *moqueca* for two.

LOCATION
3550 S. Harbor Blvd., No. 201 (Emporium Marine Landing), Oxnard, (805) 204-0970, www.moqueca-restaurant.com. Weekend reservations essential.

PRICE
Moquecas (for two), \$16 to \$72; entrées, \$16 to \$22; sharable appetizers and salads, \$7 to \$16. Lunch, about \$13.

DETAILS
Monday to Friday 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday noon to 10 p.m.; and Sunday noon to 9 p.m. Most credit cards. Full bar, wine. Lot parking.

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Mo' Moqueca

More images of Moqueca, and its most popular dishes, online.

quotient of any dish. Espirito Santo-style *moquecas* reflect the Portuguese side of Brazilian cooking rather than the more African-influenced *moquecas* of Bahia state, where cooks enrich the stews with coconut milk and palm fruit oil called *dende*. Closely related is Moqueca's *bobó de camarão* of lime-marinated shrimp simmered with coconut milk and a light purée of fresh yucca root.

Glowing orange *paella* like *arroz de polbo* comes studded with marinated octopus chunks. Beef and chicken stroganoff are on the menu "because everyone in Brazil loves them," says Sarcinelli, whose daughter-in-law, Tatiana, is Moqueca's self-taught chef.

Desserts are as rich as the cocktails are festive. Tart-sweet glazed passion fruit mousse complements the seafood, but some hedonists go for the *pave de bombom* — layers of flan, whipped cream and crushed candy bar.

Moqueca's opening was a leap from the Brazilian carved-meat *churrascaria* restaurants so popular with many Americans. But, Sarcinelli says, "my customers kept asking me, 'What do Brazilians eat besides meat?' That convinced me they were ready to explore another side of our food."

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HARBOR: The views are pleasing at Moqueca in Oxnard, but diners come for the seafood stews.

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