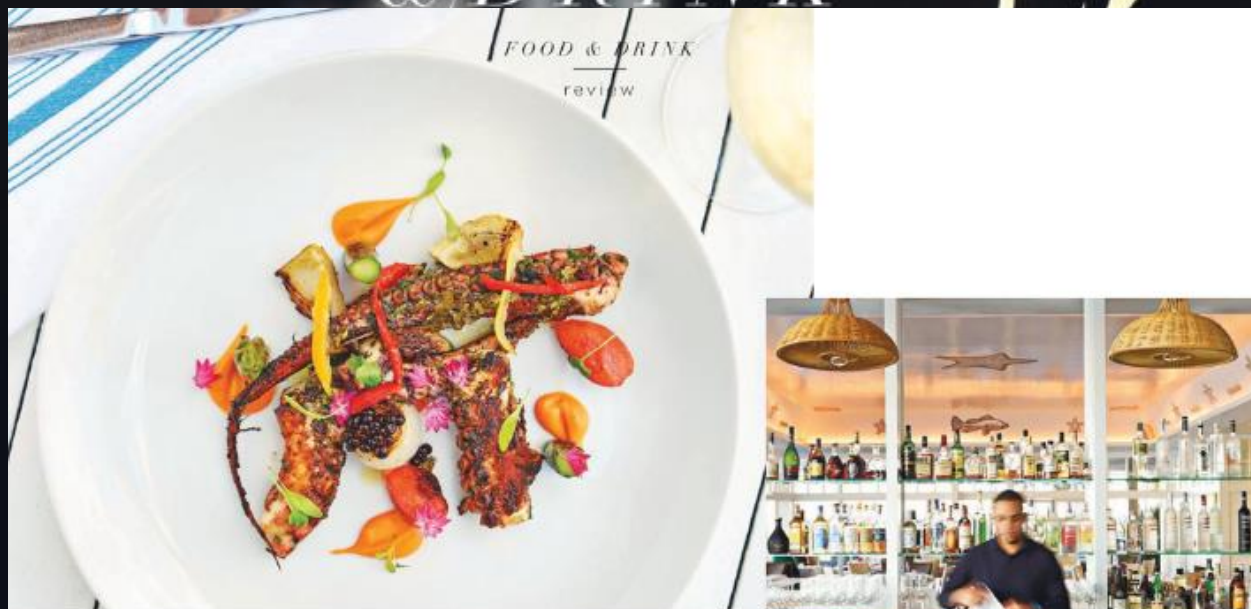


# MIAMI

## FOOD & DRINK

CHEF  
THE  
ON  
FATI  
DOV



FOOD & DRINK  
review

Last summer saw the launch of a teeny trend in Miami that, by this summer, promises to become firmly established. We're talking about the establishment of the upscale beach club. Such venues, where locals as well as visitors are welcome to hang out in elegant, high-end fashion, require only three elements to make them work: a gorgeous resort where attention to detail is a given, an unparalleled coastal location where the water view is paramount, and a chef-driven restaurant and lounge where the bites and sips are an attraction even when the sun goes down.

Envisioned by Sami Kohen and Jacques Wulfaert, Palmeiras Beach Club at Grove Isle not only fits that mold, it just might break it. Set on a verdant spit of an island located between downtown and Coconut Grove, Palmeiras Beach Club is a restored 20-room boutique hotel and dry beach, offering luxurious amenities ranging from spa services to yacht dockage to the awning-covered Taittinger Lounge and Beach Club, set with cabanas and Hampton-style daybeds. Most importantly, though, the community is private, the bay front restaurant and 15-seat Patron Tequila Lounge are, like the hotel, open to the public.

Fashioned in all white, the 60-seat dining room of the eatery features hand-painted ceilings by resident artists James and Kate Hahn; outside, a patio with a smattering of tables, tucked into nooks here and there, allows Biscayne Bay to be the decor highlight. But the real star of this Mediterranean-like setting is Venezuelan chef Alfredo Alvarez, whose culinary skills have been valued from Rome to Cancun and whose loyal following helps make every restaurant he launches an instant success. Locally, he's most recently known for his role in Seaspace (formerly Sensale & Pepper). With Chef de Cuisine Abraham Silva at his side, Alvarez has created a menu that's both intriguing and approachable.

A big puff of cheese-dusted pita bread, served with olive oil and balsamic vinegar, begins a meal, along with service of a cocktail or glass of wine from the well-curated list. The nibble

## BACK IN BUSINESS

With the expertise of chef Alfredo Alvarez in the kitchen—and a Champagne lounge to boot—Palmeiras Beach Club brings much-needed new life to Grove Isle.

By Jen Karetnick  
Photography by Michael Pisarri

**NEW TASTES AND SENSATIONS**  
Clockwise from top left: Grilled Spanish octopus with tomato confit, seaweed air, zucchini, preserved lemon and salmorejo; the bar area at Palmeiras Beach Club; a server puts the finishing touch on a Mykonos Queen, a cocktail made with FOS Maastha liqueur, lime juice and muddled raspberries that's topped off with Champagne.



## FOOD & DRINK

review



**SWEETIE DARLING** The mango-coconut mousse with chocolate dacquoise, coconut ice cream and mango gastrique is one of the many treats on the dessert menu.

and sip come in handy as you peruse the menu, which is a mélange of Mediterranean coastal dishes, incorporating influences from France, Greece, Italy and Spain. Alvarez is a dab hand with sea fare and pastas, and the Palmeiras menu is chock-full of both, along with a few raw bar items, pizzas, meats and sandwiches. Add in a couple of specials that are cooked in the brick oven—fish coated in salt then doused in rum and fired tableside, for instance—and it can be difficult to make an immediate decision.

Grilled Spanish octopus, for example, is a masterful starter, a star of succulent tentacles sauced with bright and tangy salmoreglio, the citric content of which is further emphasized by preserved lemon, tomato confit and piquillo peppers. A froth of so-called seaweed air, looking as if it had been scooped off the tip of a wave, crowns the octopus with a bit of brine. Not a fan of the cephalopod? No worries. Alvarez and Silva utilize the exact combination of ingredients—minus the seaweed air—to enhance grilled African prawns. Curls of piquillo peppers and lemon are also vibrant additions to the crispy Moroccan artichokes appetizer, a quartet of deep-fried hearts. Dipped into a creamy cilantro dressing, these greaseless, temporalike delicacies are a pick-me-up to the palate.

Salads do the same kind of work, particularly a terrine-style lump crab nicoise. Dressed with a 15-year-old balsamic condiment, the nicoise is a lovely peppery layering of baby arugula, upland cress, mâche, haricots verts, sun-dried tomatoes and Kalamata olives, all topped with chunks of pure white crabmeat. If your senses still slumber after this, you may need smelling salts.

Equally impressive, the Duroc pork chop—14 ounces with a tomahawk bone—is set over Gala apples, glazed fennel, shallot puree and turnips. The tender, juicy pink meat is brushed with passionfruit au jus, and there's no escaping the wafting aromatics of this hearty meal. Fortunately, you won't want to. Nor will you want to avoid any of the crisp-skinned fish dishes, particularly the Mediterranean turbot, which is dotted with sturgeon caviar, or the branzino, which features a garlic-saffron sauce moistening its golden exterior. Both fish dishes arrive with an assortment of vegetables, ranging from roasted pearl onions to broccolini to baby zucchini and carrots.

Alvarez spends a good deal of time surveying the dining room, greeting guests he knows and observing newcomers, as well as perusing the plates that come out of his kitchen. If he even suspects that you may have a problem with his caramelized banana tatin dessert, he is tableside in an instant, pursing his lips and instructing the server to replace it with a mango-coconut mousse with chocolate dacquoise, coconut ice cream and mango gastrique, or anything else to your liking, for that matter.

This restaurant at Grove Isle, once a heady venture under Robbin Haas called Baleen around the turn of the millennium, has been through several less-than-successful changes since. Many have tried to reform it in the past 15 years, including James Beard Award winner Mark Militello, and they've failed. With a cadre of disciples, decades of experience and confidence that few can match, Alvarez could well be the one to return this destination to the epicure's roster. ■

## Palmeiras Beach Club at Grove Isle

4 Grove Isle Drive, Miami, 305.858.8300, palmeirasbeachclub.com

Open daily: breakfast, 7-10:30 a.m.; lunch, 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; dinner, 5-11 p.m.

Fruits de mer, \$5-\$200; appetizers, \$17-\$24; salads, \$16-\$19; pizzas and pastas, \$15-\$30; sandwiches, \$18-\$24; entrees, \$32-\$56; desserts, \$13-\$16

### Visit Preview

Not sure if you want to commit? A video of the entire facility—and its incomparable view—awaits on the Palmeiras Beach Club website.

### More is More

Pitchers of cocktails such as the Hemingway Daiquiri and the Bubble Berry Smash lend a very Hamptons feel to the proceedings.

### Private Matters

The Pomeroy's Chef's Table seats up to 20 guests in a room that evokes the joie de vivre of the belle époque.

### That's Entertainment!

On weekend nights, the Taittinger Lounge offers both live music and a DJ spinning tracks—and as much Champagne as you can handle.



**MEN OF GOOD TASTE** Palmeiras Beach Club Executive Chef Alfredo Alvarez and Chef de Cuisine Abraham Silva are hoping to give Grove Isle its groove back.