

PINECREST

DINING

PALMEIRAS
BEACH CLUB AT
GROVE ISLE

4 Grove Isle Drive, Miami
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palmeirasbeachclub.com

FOOD
FASHION
DESIGN

COCONUT GROVE GEM

BY GAIL SCOTT



Clockwise from right: Seared escolar with Sriracha aioli and ginger soy dressing; Chocolate Feast; wild Chilean sea bass with spiced couscous made with tomato confit and a fennel aromatic blue crab broth. Opposite page: Executive Chef Alfredo Alvarez knows how to tempt the palate with his Mediterranean-inspired dishes.



COCONUT GROVE'S GROVE ISLE has had several good restaurants in the past at its luxury bayside property, but the new Palmeiras Beach Club, conceptualized by hospitality gurus Sami Kohen and Jacques Wulffaert, has raised the bar to another level.

Entering Grove Isle is like entering a secret oasis. As you sweep past the guard gate and proceed to the rear of the property, you are warmly greeted at the valet stand and by the hostess, who is in the lobby escorting guests to the new-and-improved restaurant.

The space has always had beautiful bay views, but the new interior is particularly striking. As you enter the restaurant, you feel as though you are dining seaside in Palma de Mallorca. Beautiful Brazilian music and a peaceful vibe make for a very comfortable dining experience. There is plenty of indoor and outdoor seating, depending upon your preference, in addition to a 20-seat private chef's table sponsored by Perrier-Jouet. We were there on a Tuesday evening, and the restaurant was comfortably full with residents, locals and hotel guests. It was a cool night, so we opted to sit inside, but we enjoyed watching guests mingling around the outdoor fire pit.

Executive Chef Alfredo Alvarez is at the helm of this Miami jewel. He was most recently at the now-closed Biscayne Diner and prior to that, spent some time at Seasalt and Pepper (now Seaspice). His cooking skills are on full display in his Mediterranean-inspired menu as he translates molecular gastronomy into some very special touches. Each component of the dishes is carefully chosen, right down to the house-made caviar.

Our waiter, Zoltran, was incredibly welcoming, as was the chef, who came to our table and explained the menu and his vision of seaside dining. We started with a glass of prosecco and decided to leave it up to the chef to introduce us to his cuisine.

Our meal began with grilled Spanish octopus with tomato confit, seaweed air, zucchini, preserved lemon, salmoriglio and piquillo peppers. The octopus was cooked flawlessly and the seaweed air felt like the sea had kissed the octopus. The second appetizer was the seared escolar, which was an exquisite dish served with Sriracha aioli and a salad of upland cress (sourced locally), pickled pears and lychee in a ginger-soy dressing; it was in perfect balance and my favorite dish of the evening.

Since we were staying on the light side this evening, we transitioned to a crisp sauvignon blanc from St. Francis Winery in Sonoma with hints of tropical fruit and a clean finish. This food-forward wine married well with the pasta and fish dishes to come.

We first tried the tagliolini tartufo, made with black truffle shavings, fresh tagliolini, shallots and arugula. Sometimes the simplest dishes are the best; with top-quality ingredients, the chef hit a home run with this one.

We also tried the wild Chilean sea bass, for which the restaurant is known. Alvarez explained that he had just gotten in new cassole pottery that day, and we enjoyed the tasty fish perched on top of a cassoulet of caramelized shallots and potatoes.

We finished our meal with the Chocolate Feast, a visually appealing dessert that was, more importantly, absolutely scrumptious. The torte was made with a Valrhona crust, black and white ganache, chocolate soil, black currant sorbet and candied pecans. The black currant was truly special – we didn't leave a bite. Coffee and tea service were properly done with a perfect macchiato and a generous selection of teas.

If you are looking for an intimate meal with gorgeous views, you will not be disappointed at Palmeiras Beach Club. Bravo, Chef Alvarez! ■

