

Sustainability at Claremont Resort



Goat Cheese Terrine with pickled Beets
Courtesy Claremont Resort and Spa

Inspiring things are happening in many kitchens in the East Bay these days. Now the elegant **Claremont Resort** is following suit, working with **Chef Josh Thomsen** and offering one of the tastiest and sustainable menus around. Here's all the details:

Meritage at the Claremont

41 Tunnel Rd., Berkeley, 510-843-3000

Much like Heavenly Ski Area in Lake Tahoe, which wraps the heights overlooking the lake including the boundary between California and Nevada, the beautiful Claremont Resort covers an upward swath of the East Bay in Oakland and Berkeley. Its white turrets can be seen from almost any viewpoint looking east, like a palatial beacon that echoes of the past yet has translated into the present time with a welcoming sort of intrigue. The Claremont's latest project, Meritage, is a revamped restaurant that features seasonal, organic ingredients and local wines.

Chef Josh Thomsen has created a fascinating menu around his favorite food and wine pairings. On each of two facing pages there are three sets of wine suggestions matched with three dishes that reflect the best of what is in season. Flowery whites from around the greater Bay Area go with a delicate goat cheese terrine, layered with finely sliced potatoes and served with lightly pickled baby beets, or a flavorful Castroville artichoke soup. Zesty reds are suggested combinations for meatier plates. Portions of any of the offerings are available in small and large so that an array of dishes can cover the spacious white-clothed tables and a veritable food journey can be undertaken with each party. Instead of sharing one appetizer and opting for two entrees and dessert there can be five or six small plates, paired with short wine pours, which reflect a diverse edible bounty. This also makes the restaurant an affordable place to dine, since the small plates are relatively inexpensive, as are the smaller glasses of wine, still generous.

Organic cocktails and a good selection of bubbly (jovially called "Sparklers" here), together with Hog Island Oysters are a fantastic entrée into the meal. You'll be especially tempted toward discovering the full menu after passing by the large glass fridge cabinet near the hostess stand, full of a pretty display of the latest in-season ingredients that have inspired the menu. For late fall Brussels sprouts, still on their Dr. Suess-esque stalks shield bowls and beakers of fuyu persimmons, chanterelle mushrooms, several types of squash, and handsome fennel bulbs.

Although the menu is surprisingly honed for its first month of service, there are a couple shortfalls in the beginning courses. The pasta for the handmade lobster-stuffed ravioli could have had its gluten more built up and been smothered with less of the buttery sauce, but the filling was excellent and smooth, and made the succulent lobster tendrils stand out. The halibut offering could have stood less ground pepper and less cooking altogether, though its bed of nutty quinoa and currants with citrus-infused oil would have set it off in a brilliant manner had the fish been taken off the heat a minute sooner. The bulk of the menu, however, verged on flawless. That can easily be attributed to the chef's rich culinary background designing menus in Las Vegas and working as a "marine" of sorts in the French Laundry kitchen earlier in his career. Each plate has a finished, yet understated appeal, especially the divinely fatty pork belly, the rare rack of lamb, elevated with a fine Bonny Doon "Le Cigar Volant," and also the sumptuous aforementioned terrine. Amazingly, even these items can be ordered in small size – a unique and admirable freedom that is hard to find in an increasingly chef-driven restaurant scene.

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Attentive service and one incredible view cap off the experience of Meritage, together with the gluttonous, yet enticing dessert choices. Rich, dark chocolate "cupcakes" are hardly the bakesale variety, handmade ice creams (for the season eggnog and cinnamon flavors) top scrumptious bread puddings and fruit tarts, each served with a creative touch and a cursive "M" for Meritage somewhere on the plate. After-dinner drinks are as exciting as the cocktails and wines, with several deep ports and well-picked dessert wines along with carefully made coffee drinks and herbal tisanes.

The chef has done something truly unique with his wine-focused menu, which can be enjoyed just as well by non-drinkers or vegetarians as omnivores, and can be customized more than any other high-end Bay Area menu. Each subtle detail has been thought through, and that lends to one incredible eating experience. Sustainability, and seasonality, is at the base of it all.

Bring Chef Josh Thomsen's ingredients to your kitchen and table with this linked-up mini-guide:

[Bonny Don Wines](#)

[Hog Island Oysters](#)

[Pezzini Artichokes from Castroville](#)

[Half Moon Bay Farms Harvest Guide \(PDF\)](#)

[Fulton Valley Farms Organic Chicken](#)

[Niman Ranch Beef](#)

[Hudson Valley Foie Gras](#)