

# Food & Wine

SF benefit:  
Female chefs,  
sommeliers  
team up G10

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Sunday, August 4, 2013 | Section G

MICHAEL BAUER *Dining Out*

## A16 in Oakland stands on its own

Maybe privacy is a thing of the past. With cameras on just about every corner, and GPS tracking our whereabouts 24/7, we have become comfortable as public beings.

It wasn't long ago that the only restaurants open to the street were small neighborhood places that couldn't afford to wall off the windows. If there were windows, they likely were covered.

Yet, as I was sitting in the packed A16 in Oakland's Rockridge district, it became apparent that in 2013, seeing and being seen trumps privacy.

A glass garage door in front gives diners a view of College Avenue and the burrito shop across the street. When it's



John Storey / Special to The Chronicle

rolled up, the line between indoors and out blurs further.

That wasn't the case when the space was Garibaldi's or  
*Bauer continues on G9*

**The pansotti at A16 in Oakland is filled with ricotta cheese and roasted eggplant and garnished with cherry tomatoes.**

**FOOD**

# Oakland's A16 stands on own as destination

*Bauer from page G1*

Hudson, or even when the space was reconfigured into Hudson/Marzano.

**Bustling scene**

Now as A16, Shelley Lindgren and Victoria Libin, partners at SPQR and A16 in San Francisco, have rejoined the space into a 48-seat restaurant and 30-seat bar. The unified space now makes sense, and the results are evident when you walk in the door. A reservation has become prized, and the restaurant already feels like part of the East Bay dining fabric.

Anyone on the well-traveled sidewalk can witness not only the sea of bobbing heads at the wooden tables, but also the crowd at the curved bar, activity at the tiled, domed oven that creates excellent Neapolitan style pizzas (\$14-\$20) and modern local artwork that depicts legends of Campania.

The vibe is so integrated with the neighbor-

**A16**

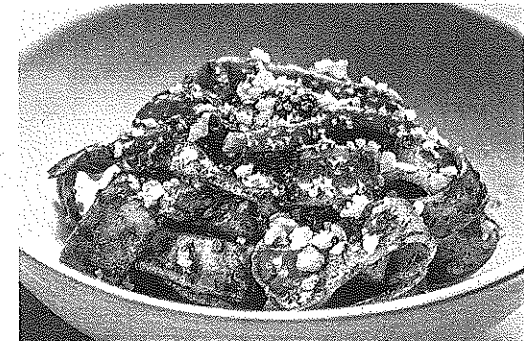
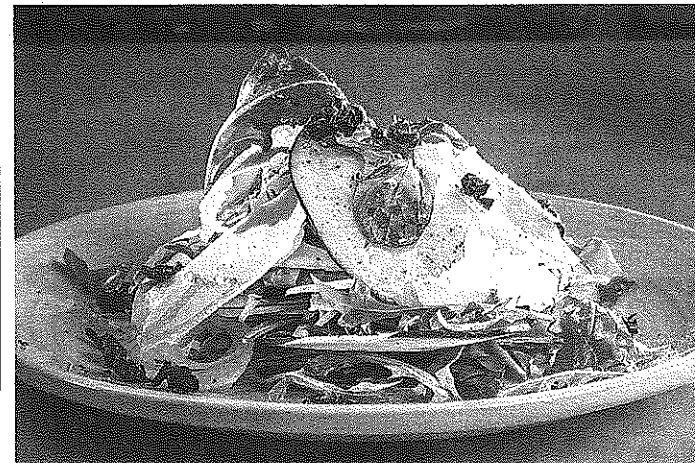
5356 College Ave. (near Hudson Street), Oakland (510) 768-8003. [www.a16rockridge.com](http://www.a16rockridge.com). Dinner 5:30-10 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 5-10 p.m. Sunday. Late-night menu 10-11 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 10 p.m.-midnight Friday-Saturday. Full bar. Reservations and credit cards accepted. Street parking, sometimes difficult.

- Overall:** ★★★
- Food:** ★★★
- Service:** ★★★
- Atmosphere:** ★★★
- Prices:** \$\$\$\$ (Most entrees more than \$25)
- Noise rating:** 🗣️ Too noisy for normal conversation (80+ decibels)
- ★★★★ Extraordinary
- ★★★ Excellent
- ★★ Good ★ Fair □ Poor



Photos by John Storey / Special to The Chronicle

Attention to detail is noted as Dan Damone makes Neapolitan-style pizzas, which are perfectly blistered, at A16 restaurant in Oakland's Rockridge neighborhood.



Left, the kohlrabi salad at A16 in Oakland; above, the calamarata pasta is braised in squid ink and served with fried bread crumbs.

### Fits the neighborhood

While the owners have transported the name and sensibility from San Francisco, the concept fits into the Rockridge vibe; the interior is larger and more open, and it has a private room that seats 40. The restaurant also has a full liquor license, so Lindgren's husband, Greg Lindgren, who also owns Rye and 15 Romolo in San Francisco, has crafted a cocktail list that's as unique as Lindgren's Italian wine list.

The food also has its own personality under Rocky Maselli, a Bay Area native who spent 15 years in Oregon's Willamette Valley as chef/owner of Osteria Sfizo before returning home. The A16 brand is still evident in the puffy blistered pizzas and dishes like burrata with tomatoes, olive oil and sea salt (\$12), but Maselli has also added his own touches.

He creates some glorious-of-the-moment dishes such as kohlrabi salad (\$12), where the crisp yet fleshy root is sliced thin and combined with fennel, arugula, fried capers and grana padano; or an heirloom tomato and melon salad (\$13) with purslane, shal-

lots, thyme and ricotta salata. His family's roots are in Puglia, and you can detect that sensibility in his food.

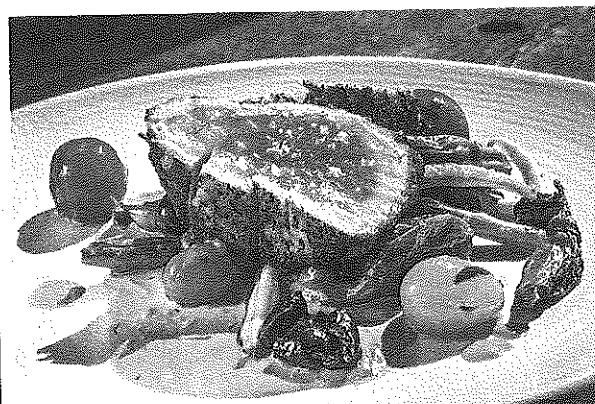
Whereas San Francisco's location has become known for its pork and beef meatballs, on one visit Maselli made a version with rabbit (\$24). On another night he switched to lamb (\$25) and accompanied it with roasted eggplant and tomatoes.

Each of the four main courses comes with a choice of one of the four contorni (\$6-\$8 if ordered a la carte). That includes wedges of roasted fennel with lemon and bottarga, and roasted summer squash with cherry tomatoes and mint. These dishes, like the rest of the menu, change often.

### Main courses

One time, besides the meatballs, main courses included salmon (\$28), roast leg of lamb (\$28) and braised pork shoulder (\$25). The next week those had been replaced by roast chicken leg and thigh (\$21) on a bed of sweet corn with pancetta and sage, swordfish (\$28) coated in herb-roasted bread crumbs with roasted grapes and caper aioli, pork sausage (\$24) and hanger steak (\$26). In every case, the execution is exceptional. And while each has rustic origins, they are kissed with the California lightness that defines the way we eat.

Pasta remains a strength of the kitchen, whether the orecchiette (\$12/\$20) with firm



The California albacore salad with mixed vegetables is a popular offering at A16 in Oakland.

chunks of lamb sausage and fried senise chiles from Southern Italy; cavatelli (\$12/\$20) with geoduck sugo, chiles and cannellini beans; or pansotti with a ricotta and eggplant filing.

I'm often disappointed with dishes made with squid ink because this ingredient can permeate everything around it. But not so with the calamarata (\$11/\$19). While the thick rings of pasta, which mimic cut-up squid, might have resembled a mountain of mud under the night lights, the flavors are clean and sharp, balanced with fried bread crumbs and warm cherry tomatoes.

The restaurant also features crudo — I'm in love with the Mendocino sea urchin (\$12) with herb salad — along with small dishes to get you started such as deep-fried olives (\$8) and bac-

cala meatballs (\$11).

Desserts (\$9) are more extensive and better than you'll find at many restaurants, including a rich chocolate semifreddo with espresso cream and salted caramel; an exceptional warm, flaky plum crostada accompanied by rosemary ricotta gelato; a cool and creamy honey panna cotta with roasted peaches; and hot ricotta fritters with apricot compote and toasted almonds.

### Seamless service

Lindgren has amassed knowledgeable staff members who can lead diners to some unusual wines on the list and can explain the menu, which can be peppered with unfamiliar ingredients such as friarell pepper, dragoncello and tropea onion. It feels as if the staff has already jelled, acting as ambassadors for the restaurant, just as

## The wine list

Whenever I go to A16, I almost feel as if it's my first time looking at a wine list. There are so many wines that I haven't heard of from Italy's central and southern regions that the list might as well be written in Cyrillic.

I marvel at the collection of approximately 275 wines, then close the menu and ask Shelley Lindgren or any of her well-trained sommeliers to make suggestions and come up with pairings for the food I order.

I've never been disappointed, and I've rarely had a wine that I've tried before. There are about 40 wines by the glass (\$9-\$17), and there's always something new.

Most restaurants' inventory of sparkling wine doesn't extend much past a prosecco or two. A16 has five — and 14 other regional sparklers. If you're talking about red wines of Campania, they are broken down by regions; in all, there are 38.

There are very few places where I have such trust in the service staff, but at A16 the wine list is continually refreshed with new discoveries, and the service is impeccable.

Unlike A16 San Francisco, the Oakland restaurant has a full bar, making the decision of what to order even more difficult. The cocktail menu has been put together by Lindgren's husband, Greg Lindgren, who owns Rye and 15 Romolo, and the combinations are interesting and the balance superb. The staff is also expert at the classics. As for beer, there are about a dozen from the East Bay and Italy.

If you bring your own wine, corkage is \$25.

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at A16 and SPQR in San Francisco.

However, San Franciscans shouldn't think that just because they have an A16 in the back yard, there's no reason to go to Oakland. While the sensibility is similar, the new restaurant has a different feel and it will be exciting to see how it

evolves. Still, if you love one, you'll love the other.

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