



FOOD & DINING

The latest reviews and listings from throughout Oregon

Platter: Food Finds, Restaurant Reviews and Dining Trends

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By MICHAEL C

The Oregonian

SHIVER ME TIMBERS -- The only unpalatable aspect of David Siegel's debut as a Portland head chef earlier this week is the name of the place where he is holding forth. That would be Belly Timber, not to be confused with soon-to-open Belly in the former Terroir space in Northeast Portland.

This Victorian-era slang term for food was adopted by the restaurant's owners Michele Stultz and Tara George. Belly Timber is housed in a mid-19th century residence on Southeast Hawthorne, most recently home to Chef Tucker's Patisserie. Victorian in a Victorian. Get it?

Dopey moniker aside, the house is attractive, with upstairs-downstairs seats for 55 and a custom-built, dark-stained Douglas fir bar made with reclaimed lumber. Summer will see additional seating outdoors.

Since moving here from the East Coast in 2005, Siegel, 28, has cooked at Nostrana and Meriwether's and run the East Side Dining Club, a periodic, roving feast. Belly Timber will blend the Portland standard farm-to-table seasonal focus with Siegel's creative mind, his experience with charcuterie and his simple, eclectic style.

The kitchen's spicy sopressata anchors a cheese/meat/veg starter. Also look for spring chicken soup with homemade chickpea noodles and gratings of Siegel's herb-salt cured egg yolk, all laced with lovage. Siegel's burger is made with his cured and smoked bacon, and Tillamook cheddar. Starters run from \$5 to \$10, mains are below \$20, and desserts, including banana pudding with vanilla wafers, go for about \$5.

(Belly Timber opened June 11 at 3257 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd, 503-235-3277; dinner Tuesday-Sunday)

LUCIER DOSSIER -- Barely three weeks old, Lucier at RiverPlace is the most elegantly appointed restaurant to open in Portland in decades, if not ever (see Platter's preview at oregonlive.com/dining). Most of the curious visitors have been flashing their finery, though in true Portland style, general manager Donny Sullivan laughs off any firm dress code: "If people want to dress up or come in their flip-flops after a river walk" that is all right.

The kitchen is still in its shakedown period, and A&E waits a couple of months before delivering full dining reviews to let kitchens find their rhythm. But with interest so high in Lucier, we're noting some first impressions from a recent visit.

The menu format is great, encouraging diners to create their own three, four or five course tasting menus -- mixing and matching entrees and starters at will. But within a week of opening, highly touted sommelier Scott Calvert was gone, a topic on which the otherwise gregarious Sullivan is tight-lipped.

Sullivan concedes that Lucier is a "big restaurant" and "getting everyone on the same page" has been a challenge. It is hard to say what page executive

chef Pascal Chureau was on when he conceived foie gras with coconut foam, macadamia nut "glass" (like brittle) and a chunk of pineapple. Lesson: The luscious liver needs something to complement the richness but it's not a tropical fruit buffet. The dish also shows an early tendency toward creativity for creativity's sake, rather than putting clean and clear flavors first. Also, halibut "sous vide" -- slow-cooked at low temperature supposedly to ensure incomparably moist flesh -- was inexplicably dry.

More successful was a sensible yet creative striped bass carpaccio, thinly-sliced raw fish enhanced by tart yuzu and embellished (though perhaps unnecessarily) with bits of olive, currants and more. I loved "The Egg" -- a lightly scrambled duck egg served in its shell topped with sevruga caviar and accompanied by teardrop-shaped brioche toasts -- and enjoyed the butter-poached lamb with sweetbreads, pea shoots and fingerling potatoes in the supporting cast.

Clearly, Lucier is a place to watch. Stay tuned. (1910 S.W. River Drive, 503-222-7300; lucier-portland.com)

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