

FOOD SCENE

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Scrumptious Scoops

Humphry Slocombe has made it to the East Bay, and it's darn good.

BY LAUREN BONNEY

Humphry Slocombe may serve classically recognizable flavors, such as Tahitian Vanilla, Blue Bottle Vietnamese Coffee, and Here's Your Damn Strawberry. But the ice-cream purveyor also ventures into the unusually delicious realm, with scoops highlighting unconventional ingredients like foie gras, salt and pepper, prosciutto, and potato chips.

We know what you're thinking: foie gras ice cream? But trust us—every bite is exceptional. Co-founders Jake Godby and Sean Vahey started Humphry Slocombe in 2008, and have been cranking up the flavor ever since. Godby lovingly crafts all the ice cream himself, and the bases, toppings, and baked goodies are house-made in the San Francisco-based kitchen.

After opening stores in San Francisco's Mission District and the Ferry Building, Godby and Vahey decided to migrate over to the East Bay, and at the end of August, the duo opened the latest Humphry Slocombe shop in a shipping container, in the heart of Uptown Oakland's Hive complex.

The new shop serves 12 different flavors that rotate on a monthly basis. So, if you don't see your favorite flavor on the menu, go ahead and try something new—perhaps Secret Breakfast (an amazing bourbon and cornflakes concoction) or Brûlée Fig and Crème Fraîche (a deliciously tangy creation with pieces of toffee brittle scattered throughout). Besides, you can taste test every flavor—yep, every single one—if you're not quite sure what you're in the mood for, so don't be afraid to be adventurous. humphryslocombe.com.



ELOTES

Summer corn, sour cream, ancho chile paste, and lime juice.

PARALLEL LINES

Limited-edition flavor, featuring caramel and house-made blondies.

PEPPER + MINT CHIP

Fresh mint, dark chocolate, and black pepper.

REVIEW



Perle Is Truly a Gem

Fancy yet fun, this new Montclair bistro and wine bar has it all.

BY NICHOLAS BOER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA MING WONG

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A little after 9 p.m. on a recent Thursday, Perle Wine Bar was in full swing, and a crisply dressed Marcus Garcia marched into his restaurant, making a beeline for our table. Startled at first, I soon realized he was just angling for the dimmer switch behind me. To Garcia's eye, Perle's flashy dining room needed a little softening.

Still, Garcia—a father of four who lives in Concord—made us feel particularly special and part of a select crowd. “I’m opening a three-liter bottle,” said the restaurant co-owner and sommelier, after drawing us into relaxed conversation and asking if we’d care for champagne. “I’m pouring a glass for everyone.”

As the assistant manager at Prima Ristorante in Walnut Creek for five years and the wine director at Fleur de Lys in San Francisco for more than a decade, Garcia has cultivated a deep knowledge of wine, while great customer service comes from instinct. A keen eye for detail balances his larger-than-life personality. (The moment I broke out my credit card, for instance, he disengaged from a lively group at the bar to retrieve our check.)

On my first visit—arriving at 5:31 p.m.—the suave Garcia and marble-accented dining room felt disturbingly posh—better suited to Hollywood or Vegas than Montclair Village. Greeted by a beaming, French-accented

Streaks of saffron rouille, a flutter of fresh dill, and juicy spheres of fennel sausage added layers of flavor.

waiter, we felt a little bit self-conscious. But as the restaurant filled, we fully relaxed, and by the time the food arrived, we were completely sold on the concept. Because Perle's biggest superstar, it turns out, is chef and co-owner Robert Lam.

Our first appetizer brought split-roasted marrowbone showered in vibrant green herbs and purple flower petals. On the same plate, lying in wait, a circle of beef tartare came dotted with caviar-sized “pearls” of truffle juice (a spherical trick of molecular gastronomy). We spread both meat and marrow on the accompanying toast points, and then turned to the breadbasket. And once the bone was wiped



clean and the last bit of pristine steak consumed, we slathered the remaining bread with Lam's tangy house-turned butter, with its hint of roasted garlic and sprinkle of pink peppercorns.

Dish after dish made an impression. Raw oysters opened their shells to ocean-fresh uni

and brûléed foie gras, creating a creamy umami sensation. It was “Suprême,” just as the oyster dish is called.

My favorite creation, however, was a bowl of plump Fox Island mussels stewed with shallots, garlic, and tomato; deglazed with Pernod; and garnished with cubes of just-fried French bread—a brilliant touch. Streaks of saffron rouille, a flutter of fresh dill, and juicy spheres of fennel sausage added layers of flavor.

Lam, who sold his Asian-fusion restaurant, Butterfly, in San Francisco after running it for 17 years, is having a blast cooking French Mediterranean. (He staged at Acquerello in San Francisco during Perle's remodel to hone up on his Italian cooking, and his refined pastas prove it.) And he is a consistently relaxed presence in the dining room, delivering plates and checking in with guests.

Despite the foie gras and four-figure Bordeaux and Burgundies, Perle is a venture in fun—as much a drop-in neighborhood wine bar as a fine-dining foray. The menu includes a French onion dip burger and charcuterie “snacks,” such as a meaty slab of *tête de cochon* (an aspic-bound blend of flavorful Berkshire and Kurobuta pork)—just a couple of the



Opposite page: Fox Island mussels stewed with fennel sausage, shallots, tomato, and garlic. This page, from left: Marcus Garcia and Robert Lam; beef tartare topped with truffle pearls, and a split-roasted marrowbone adorned with herbs and flowers.

inexpensive options. And all the wine-friendly small plates—we adored the gorgeous house-smoked salmon toasts and deviled eggs topped with fried oysters—lend the 46-seat Perle (including 11 at the marble bar) a casual air.

Many of the hundreds of wines on the list are priced in the \$40 range per bottle, and a wide selection of wines and champagnes are available by the glass or 2.5-ounce tastes. On our visit, even the most expensive glass (priced at \$39—a local shout-out to Livermore's Steven Kent) was still a tremendous value; the 2012 Lineage retails for around \$150 a bottle.

Having opened on a bit of a shoestring and being overwhelmed with walk-ins during its opening weeks, Perle did fall short of Michelin-star status.

Some of the accessories needed replacing, and toward the end of the night—when the tiny exhibition kitchen was slammed—our plates of lush onglet steak and sous vide poulet rôti were not as precisely presented as Lam would have hoped, I'm sure.

But if there are any vulnerabilities, they only add to Perle's humanity. (The restaurant's name is inspired by champagne beads, oysters, and other gems of the sea.) This is a one-of-a-kind restaurant whose owners are probably the most likable geniuses you'll ever meet.

And where else are you going to get a free glass of Pol Roger champagne, along with a backstory of how it was Winston Churchill's favorite?

2058 Mountain Blvd., Oakland, (510) 808-7767, perlewinebar.com. Dinner Tues.–Sat., brunch Sun.

SEASONAL SIPS



The Pumpkin Spice Latte: Just Say No

Forget the Starbucks standby: These five locally made, autumn-inspired lattes and caffeine-infused cocktails take the chill off fall, with house-crafted ingredients and inventive presentations. **BY KRISTEN HANEY**

MAPLE BOURBON LATTE

Coffee Shop, Lafayette and Walnut Creek

Your neighborhood place for a caffeine fix not only doles out inventive flavors year-round but also serves up seasonal tweaks on the classics—sometimes with a boozy boost.

For its Maple Bourbon Latte, Coffee Shop starts with two shots of Berkeley-roasted espresso from Bellwether Coffee, then combines it with steamed milk, 100-percent maple syrup, bourbon, a sprinkle of cinnamon, and a cinnamon-sugared mug rim for garnished flair.

“The inspiration was simply to create an interesting coffee cocktail that is warm, comforting, and truly enjoyable,” says Coffee Shop brand manager Ansley Luce. As you can expect with the addition of alcohol, the bourbon-spiked latte is only available to enjoy in-house, so pair it with one of the provided board games and a house-made pop tart. coffeeshop411.com.

ORANGE CINNAMON SPICE TEA LATTE

Inklings Coffee and Tea, Pleasanton

On Main Street, there’s no better place to cuddle up with a warm drink than Inklings Coffee and Tea.

For fall, general manager Hannah Arionus dreamed up the Orange Cinnamon Spice Tea Latte—a combination of spiced

«Say yes to the delicious Chai Latte Cocktail at Luna Tea Co. in Livermore.»



Clockwise from left: Jenni Curtice, owner of Luna Tea Co., crafts a Chai Latte Cocktail; the Orange Cinnamon Spice Tea Latte from Inklings Coffee and Tea; the Maple Bourbon Latte from Coffee Shop.



tea and steamed milk—to offer an alternative to the oftentimes artificial, mass-produced lattes.

“The pumpkin spice latte has unnecessary ingredients—sugar, additives, and ones that you probably don’t know how to pronounce,” she says. “Our goal is to offer delicious beverages without the unnecessary extra. For me, I want a fall drink that reminds me of home or Harry Potter because obviously, Harry Potter is the embodiment of all things fall.” inklingscoffee.com.

“... I want a fall drink that reminds me of home or Harry Potter ...”

—HANNAH ARIONUS, INKLINGS COFFEE AND TEA

HOT SIPHON TODDY

Duchess, Oakland

One part fall cocktail, one part chemistry experiment, the Hot Siphon Toddy from Oakland’s Duchess uses a healthy dose of science to imbue autumnal

flavors into the warm sipper.

Rye whiskey, rum, lemon juice, sweet potato syrup, black pepper tincture, and water get a kick from plenty of spice (allspice, cinnamon, clove, and ginger), all of which are added to the bottom of a two-chamber glass siphon and heated by flame. The pressure shoots the ingredients to the top chamber of the siphon, where the liquid infuses and then cools back to the bottom chamber, resulting in an incredibly smooth toddy—a process that takes around five minutes for each made-to-order drink.

Duchess bar manager Luis Ramos has been obsessed with perfecting the hot toddy since his time at Absinthe in San Francisco, where the ingredients were painstakingly presented on a tray. “They would take their time, making it as beautiful and flavorful as could be,” says Ramos. “It always inspired me to take my time with ingredients and garnishes to make them perfect.” duchessoakland.com.

CRÈME BRÛLÉE LATTE

Mountain Grounds Coffee Roaster, Martinez

It’s hard to imagine a drink more indulgent than a latte fashioned after pumpkin pie, but Mountain Grounds manages to kick the sugar rush up a notch with its own dessert-inspired beverage.

For its Crème Brûlée Latte, the shop tops house-roasted espresso and steamed milk with a layer of sugar that’s torched table-side to mimic the crackly exterior of the classic dessert. The resulting drink is only available to enjoy inside the café due to the pyrotechnics, but owner John Cassidy says that’s a big part of the appeal.

“We like finding ways to get people to pause for a couple of minutes ... to sit down and enjoy coffee and good company,” says Cassidy. mtngrounds.com.

CHAI LATTE COCKTAIL

Luna Tea Co., Livermore

This tucked-away gem in Livermore’s Blacksmith Square already had a healthy following for its test tube-sized tea blends, tea lattes, and cheekily named iced teas. (A Beach B*tch, anyone?) But looking to offer a tea-centric gathering place for the happy hour crowd, Luna Tea Co. owner Jenni Curtice began experimenting with tea cocktails.

“I wanted to provide people with an entirely new way of looking at tea,” she says. “The cocktail menu was inspired by my tea, and I spent months ... crafting them just right.”

Easily the most quaffable, the Chai Latte Cocktail tastes exactly like its nonalcoholic namesake, with Curtice’s hand-blended Spice Junkie tea (assam tea, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, black pepper, ginger, and cloves) mixed with fermented cinnamon whiskey, simple syrup, and splashes of ginger beer and coconut cream, and garnished with star anise. lunatea.co.

Chai This Now!

Make the Chai Latte Cocktail from Luna Tea Co. at home.

- 4 ounces Spice Junkie tea blend
- 4 ounces RJ Boone Hot Cinnamon whiskey
- ½ ounce simple syrup
- Splash of ginger beer
- Splash of coconut cream
- 1 whole star anise

Tea for this cocktail should be brewed extra strong. Use 3 heaping teaspoons of tea per 8 ounces of water, and brew for 7–10 minutes. Refrigerate to cool—don’t add ice, as it will water down the tea. (The tea blend can be found at Luna Tea Co. or online).

Shake the cooled tea, whiskey, and simple syrup together in a cocktail shaker, and pour over light ice. Top with a splash of ginger beer and then a splash of coconut cream. Add one flower of star anise to garnish.

“It pretty much tastes exactly like a chai latte, with the spices, a hint of sweetness, and then the creamy quality from the coconut cream, which also makes it vegan. The cinnamon whiskey completes it.” —Jenni Curtice, Luna Tea Co. owner

CALI GODLEY

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CALI GODLEY; HANNAH ARIONUS; KRISTOPHER SHINN