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# Hawaii On A Plate

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Photo by Lawrence Tabudlo

How do you showcase Hawaii’s personality through food? There are a few obvious answers — plate lunches, poke, authentic Hawaiian food and seasonal fruit. Thanks to many beloved local restaurants, there’s also a growing trend of elevating Hawaii’s locally grown ingredients in upscale ways. Chef Lance Kosaka, who has been a fixture in the food scene since 1995, is taking Hawaii’s personality to another level at the table with his recent move to Basalt Waikiki.

After leading culinary teams at iconic restaurants like Alan Wong's, Café Julia, 53 By The Sea and Mariposa, Kosaka recently made the move to Basalt and debuted a new menu that reflects both his personality and Hawaii’s unique culinary landscape. Inspired by his childhood, the menu blends familiar flavors with a sophisticated twist.

The entire menu captures Hawaii’s essence, from the flavors to the ingredients and cultural influences. Begin with starters like the Asian-inspired beef carpaccio (\$18) or lemon pepper shrimp (\$22). The carpaccio is served with medium-rare eye of round beef artfully garnished with a chili-fish sauce vinaigrette, lemon, jalapeño, Thai basil, cilantro, crispy shallots and peanuts. My recommendation — take a slice of beef, top it with the garnishes and roll it all up for a perfect bite that’s packed with Asian-inspired flavors.

The lemon pepper shrimp offers another burst of flavor. Grilled shrimp is accompanied by sauteed bacon, corn, and onions all dressed in curry oil and a balsamic reduction. Even if you’re not usually a fan of eating shrimp with the shell on, try it that way at least once — the flavors are sealed inside, giving you a rich bite of charred shrimp and curried spices.

For an entree, try the salmon ochazuke (\$38). The dish features pan-seared salmon with ochazuke risotto, bubu arare, tobiko, ikura and Japanese pickled vegetables. There’s also an interactive element — Kosaka serves the dish with a side of green tea to pour over the risotto. Start with a small pour to enjoy the mix of aromas, then add the rest as you please.

For all my pasta-loving friends, the potato gnocchi (\$29) is the showstopper. The team at Basalt makes gnocchi just the way it should be — soft, pillowy and light. Dressed in a tomato and Italian sausage sauce, the dish melts in your mouth and delivers pasta comfort in every bite. A local twist comes from the inclusion of Ho Farms eggplant and kale in the sauce.

I’m sure you heard it before, but yes, you should save room for dessert. Sous chef Zoe Shinjo, who recently joined the culinary team, created dessert options inspired by her childhood. The pog mousse pie (\$12) is filled with local favorites with its passion-orange-guava tofu mousse, macadamia nut-graham cracker crust and fresh berries. If you want something lighter, the olive oil cake with a yuzu curd and roasted grapes (\$12) is the perfect sweet ending.

Each dish at Basalt highlights Hawaii in its own way, whether through ingredients or the preparation. What stands out most is how Kosaka and his team are making local food approachable. They’re elevating dishes that locals love and introducing them to a broader audience. It’s a true reflection of Hawaii’s personality — food inspired by family, rooted in the land and welcoming to everyone open to try something new.

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