

FIRSTLOOK
Oak + Violet: Cozy and chic, indoors and out

New Menlo Park hotel restaurant's courtyard bar and dining rooms are designed to invite guests to linger

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Hotel guests need restaurants. And guests of boutique hotels — you know, the ones with \$12 room prices — have particularly high expectations. So the owners of the Park James Hotel, now construction on El Camino Road in Menlo Park, gave a lot of thought to their food and beverage offerings. The result is Oak + Violet, a dining space meant to maximize the lobby as the hotel's focal point. We popped in to check out the dinner offerings from executive chef Mike Gaid and restaurant general manager René Wiegand.

THE BAR • Chic and airy. Open to the front door of the O + V bar and step inside — and you'll find yourself outside. The massive courtyard with a signature oak tree is filled with comfy sofas and ottomans the size of the Empire State. Sink in and sip a white, or grab a bar seat. That space flows into the outdoor indoor bar, which flows into the restaurant, which in actuality reveals rooms that flow into each other. Cool lighting fixtures are everywhere.

As freshly delivered as the space is, here's what struck us: These modern dining rooms are blessedly free of open duct work. We, you can hear your conversation. Could ceiling tiles with soundproofing be a concept that will take off one of these days?

Other restaurant designers should take note. The elegance of oak ceiling, too, has high millennial ladies dining here. In fact, oak sits out at three different dining rooms in the hotel and the international array of hotel guests.

THE ROOMS • Local and seasonal ingredients inform the in-season menu. The whole brazenon (\$32) is stuffed with roasted carrots, a mélange of artichokes, olives and peppers is served on the side along with a roasted potato. We're not kidding about the beer menu: \$12 for the petite flet, \$19 for a 16-ounce home-cid. A full salad (\$14) comes quinoa with honeycrisp apples, dried lavender, goat cheese and parmesan cheese.

Among the starters and shared plates, the mini lobster tacos (\$14 for four) are two-bite appetizer treats while the bowl of Brussels sprouts (\$16), crispy and vinegary with sliced balsamic, could serve as a side dish for two or three.

Dinner is a work in progress. Instead, consider ordering the character board (\$30) upfront. It's packed with local meats and cheeses (from names like



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