

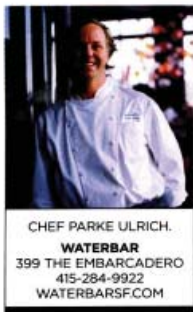
EAT+DRINK BEST BITE



WOOD-OVEN-ROASTED MAINE LOBSTER (LEFT); DINERS GATHER BENEATH THE "CAVIAR" CHANDELIER FOR SELECTIONS FROM THE RAW BAR.

Two if by Sea

DINNER WITH A VIEW? A TABLE AWAITS AT WATERBAR, PAT KULETO'S NEWEST FISHY PROJECT.
BY JESSICA BATTILANA



CHEF PARKE ULRICH.
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For a bay-side city, San Francisco has historically had little in the way of high-quality waterfront seafood restaurants. But the tide is turning, thanks in part to Waterbar, one of two new restaurants from Pat Kuleto. The restaurateur (Boulevard, Jardinière, Farallon) poured some \$18 million into the Rincon Park development that houses Waterbar and its sister restaurant, Epic Roasthouse—an investment that made him the first private owner of property on the Embarcadero in 100 years and gatekeeper to what is arguably the finest view in the city.

Though Waterbar opened concurrently with Epic (and the two share a patio and corporate offices), it operates independently—different kitchens, staff and menus. The urge to lump the two together is inevitable, yet they're completely distinct—and in a city loaded with good steak houses, it's Waterbar that's the most refreshing addition to the city's dining scene.

The centerpiece of the restaurant's design are the two 19-foot-tall saltwater fish tanks, stocked with for-display-only wolf eels, spiny lobsters

and sea cucumbers. These, along with a raw bar, dominate the front of the restaurant; take a few steps down and you're in a cozy brick dining room—one flight up, a bar greets casual diners and drinkers. You might be gazing out on local waters, but the restaurant doesn't serve a solely local selection; if it did, you'd likely see a much humbler menu consisting of calamari, sardines and crab. Yes, you'll find Tomales Bay oysters (available raw or baked) on the menu, but also Maine lobster, Gulf shrimp and such unusual (and seriously spendy) offerings as Dover sole flown in from France (\$90 for two people).

The restaurant hit the ground running, probably because much of the staff, including many of the servers (and co-owner Mark Franz), came from other Kuleto ventures. Executive chef Parke Ulrich worked at Farallon for 11 years; executive pastry chef Emily Luchetti is also a Farallon vet.

It's not surprising, then, that the entrées have a very mature sense of restraint: Poached local petrale sole is set on a bed of shaved brussels sprouts and caramelized fennel and topped with nuggets of Dungeness crab—without a heavy sauce to obscure the fish, it shines. A dish of seared haddock is punched up by robust Spanish chorizo and butter beans; they complement without overpowering. Rock cod "Colbert" (the term refers to fried, filleted fish) is a fresh take on fish-and-chips: It's a whole fried fish, backbone neatly removed, positioned to look as if it's still swimming. At lunch, the menu offers lobster, crab and shrimp rolls in addition to entrées—just what you'd want on a sunny day on the waterfront patio. The dessert list showcases homey but bold creations, such as a flaky-crust pineapple tart and a brownie parfait with caramel sauce and whipped cream.

Waterbar has plenty going for it, but its best feature may be that its arrival has given a new answer to the question, posed by visitors and locals alike, of where to get seafood—with a view—in San Francisco. x

FOR AN INSIDER'S TOUR OF WATERBAR WITH CHEF ULRICH, VISIT [7x7.COM](http://7x7.com) AND CLICK ON "RESTAURANTS."