



Dinner got off to a nice start at Lulu's Kitchen one recent evening, when sommelier Ada Reyes offered my table complimentary tastes of brut sparkling wine served in logo-engraved glasses, then offered to guide us through the wine list.

I imagine she guides often. There are four pages just for wines by the glass, including a fanciful "Flight of Your Life" (\$1,500 for 5 ounces; \$600 for 2 ounces; \$300 for 1 ounce) composed of Domaine De La Romanee-Conti 2010 Echezeaux Grand Cru, Petrus 1978 and Harlan Estate 2000 Bordeaux Blend.

Four staff sommeliers include Jordan Nova, a 24-year-old who will be taking his Master Sommelier exam in February.

All this is an example of the surprises to be found at Lulu's, starting with its location inside 1313 Main, a wine bar and retail store that opened in downtown Napa in mid-2011.

Amid the 1,300-plus international bottles, there originally were a few snack-y things like cheese and charcuterie, served in a glamorous, intimately compartmentalized setting of cork floors, a polished wood bar glowing under moody lighting, contemporary sofas in front of a fireplace, and red leather chairs.

Full kitchen

In August, owner Al Jabarin got serious with the food, adding a full kitchen and opening Lulu's Kitchen, named after his mother.

With 6,000 square feet to play with, diners can sit in a formal room in the back, but on all my visits, the front lounge was the place to be, with most of the bar and tall bistro seats filled, the small tables laden with tasting and entree plates.

As with the wine, sophisticated touches show that Jabarin has ambitions past a typical bar experience, including seasonal specials like black Burgundy truffle shaved tableside (add \$5 for appetizers, \$15 for entrees).

Under the direction of executive chef Isaac Coles, formerly of Napa's Carpe Diem Wine Bar, the cooking is relatively simple, but satisfying.

On one visit, I zeroed in on "The Flight of Bites" (\$21), which could make a perfect light meal.

The impressive sampling was composed of a delicate ricotta gnudi decorated in black truffle shaving and a lick of beurre monte, a meaty Miyagi oyster baked with braised greens and bacon, and a nubbin of bacon-crusting butternut squash accented with pear and chile.

Plus: a few forkfuls of pan-seared mac 'n' cheese topped with pancetta and apple-celery slaw, a rich lobster roll on a tiny house-made bun, and, my favorite, a thick slice of turducken roulade made of moist turkey, duck and chicken centered by a jewel of duck rillettes. The chef deep-fries the roll for a crunchy exterior, then caps it in tart apple-cranberry chutney.

Larger plates are more straightforward, but well-crafted.

A big bowl of mussels (\$16) contains the requisite chorizo, while short rib cassoulet (\$15) hits all the proper comfort notes, hot and savory with lima beans and chunks of bacon and duck.

By comparison, whey-braised rabbit ravioli (\$14) was tame, moistened in carrot consomme that could have used some fiery spice.

Smoked sturgeon salad (\$15), on the other hand, will appeal to diners who like bold flavors, since the strong fish is paired with bitterish braised greens and bacon mustard vinaigrette. It was too much for my taste, but my companion - who loves big wines and hoppy beers - was happy.

I wasn't a fan of the flatbread (\$13) either, because it was a busy recipe of butternut squash, pomegranate, Brussels sprouts, house-made white cheese and prosciutto (optional; add \$2). Too many assertive flavors competed, then fell apart.

'Secret menu'

However, diners who discover the "secret menu" will be rewarded with the 1313 hamburger (\$13). Tucked among a hidden list of snacks like wings (\$7) and

poutine (\$9), the juicy burger comes with spicy potato strings, and sings when topped with the white cheese and a truffle shaving.

To finish, the s'mores semifreddo (\$8) is a fun approach to the chocolate, graham cracker and marshmallow combination. But the spirits cart is more interesting, when a sommelier comes by with selections from three dozen liquors.

As we sipped Adrien Camut 12-year Pays d'Auge French Calvados (\$11 for 1 ounce; \$21 for 2 ounces), we savored its spiced honey flavors. And we thought, with good drink, friendly servers, and now, good food, there's plenty to like about Lulu's.

LuLu's Kitchen/1313 Main

1313 Main St. (near Clinton Street), Napa; (707) 258-1313. www.1313main.com/lulus_kitchen. Dinner 4-10 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday; limited bar menu served 2-4 p.m. and after 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Full bar. Reservations and credit cards accepted. Street parking.

Overall Rating:	TWO AND A HALF STARS	Atmosphere	Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS
Food	Rating: TWO STARS	Prices	\$\$
Service	Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS (out of 4)	Noise Rating	Noise Rating: THREE BELLS

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