

desert entertainer

bluEmber

Blending drama and daydreams for dinner

By Dale McKinney
For Desert Entertainer

Kitty Carlisle once told me that two ingredients make a successful dinner – surprise and delight. Both these rare characteristics make Rancho Las Palmas' bluEmber restaurant an experience in dining you simply won't want to miss.

Executive Chef Leanne Kamekona picked a winner with Shannon Olvera, the new chef de cuisine of bluEmber at Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa – making the luxurious resort one of the desert's only to be led by female chefs. What's more, both were born and raised in Hawaii – a region that each woman draws from for inspiration and creativity in the kitchen. Olvera's cuisine is a melting pot of fresh California, Euro Asian and Central Mexican Cuisines.

The array of appetizers (\$7-\$20), for example, capture this remarkable blend of savvy and sparkle. Tempura scallop sliders – a delicately fried scallop on a mini



Executive Chef Leanne Kamekona, left, and Chef de Cuisine Shannon Olvera rock the kitchen at bluEmber at Rancho Las Palmas.

I highly recommend the bluEmber's unique version of crab cakes. The lobster, crab and local sweet corn cakes are simply the best crab cakes I've tasted in the desert. These babies are lightly breaded and lightly fried and packed with chunks of excellent lobster and crab that just fall onto your tongue with a roasted red pepper aioli that is simply heavenly. Served on an avocado tomato salsa, these cakes are amazing.

Also amazing are the salads (\$9-\$15). The bluEmber spinach salad features watercress, smoked bacon, chopped egg and Gouda cheese tossed in an intoxicating garlic dressing. Even the seemingly simple house baby greens salad packs the surprising delights of goat cheese, Mandarin oranges, candied walnuts tossed in a unique Valencia orange vinaigrette. The toy box tomato and bocconcini martini packs bocconcini mozzarella and tiny tomatoes into an elegant martini glass with a shock of fresh basil and lemon herb olive oil that is out of this world. The bluEmber doesn't know how to do "ordinary."

The bluEmber expresses a spectacular talent for anything seafood (\$26-\$40). From sesame crusted halibut, Chilean sea bass to grilled Ahi tuna steak – no restaurant in the desert outdoes Chef Shannon's

ability with fresh fish. I was equally impressed, however, with the Brant beef bone-in ribeye with truffled mashed potatoes, crispy onions, organic veggies and a bleu cheese demi.

The blending of surprising flavor to familiar beef greatness displayed a daring confidence, a winning ability with meats (\$28-\$48). As was the stuffed Kurboto pork chop – filled with fresh spinach and herb cheese, served on a mushroom risotto (superb) with a tomato compote (brilliant).

bluEmber
Rancho Las Palmas Resort and Spa
Breakfast: 6 to 11 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Dinner: 5 to 10 p.m.
41-000 Bob Hope Drive
Rancho Mirage
(760) 568-2727

Finally, you must save room (although I don't know how that's possible) for dessert. Here whimsy rules. The bluEmber's award winning pastry chef turns the common cupcake into collections of gastronomic fantasy. The macadamia nut banana cream cupcake is actually filled with a banana mousse – as if the flawlessly moist banana cake packed with creamy macadamias weren't intoxicating enough. Also the coco Las Palmas knocked my socks off – a spiced rum and vanilla infused cupcake filled with coconut mousse and graced with a generous snowing of toasted coconut. These big, tasty creations alone are worth a trip to bluEmber.

Look, whatever you order, you'll be transported by bluEmber's sophisticated fusion of drama and daydreams. Check it out.



The Banana Cupcake

sesame bun with pickled cucumber and complemented by a spicy garlic aioli (mayo) is as elegant as it is undeniably yummy.