

TRENDSSETTER
Deluxe has made its mark with dishes like the Mediterranean pan-roasted halibut.



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Deluxe

★★★★★

30 S. Broadway, 303-722-1550, www.deluxedenver.com

Must-Try New Dishes Pan-roasted halibut

Old Favorites Chinese slow-roasted baby back ribs

Then

One night, in late 2004, *5280* critic Elisabeth True dropped into Deluxe for dinner. The urban eatery stood as a lighthouse among the secondhand stores and smoky bars on South Broadway. Over the years, though, Deluxe's success has encouraged other restaurateurs to try their luck in the neighborhood. In 2008 alone, Beatrice & Woodsley, a brilliantly designed small-plate restaurant opened; Mona's Restaurant added a second location; and Deluxe chef-owner Dylan Moore opened Delite, a drinks and small-plate lounge next door to Deluxe. On South Broadway, chic now prevails, and

we returned to Deluxe to see if the trendsetter would still impress.

Now

Years ago in L.A. I bought a dress that cuts low in the front and low in the back. Its black and white stripes align into Vs, and when I wear it I feel like I just walked out of 1940s Hollywood. We were dining at Deluxe, and the restaurant's leopard-print carpet and tightly packed two-tops begged for the Old World glamour of that dress.

When we arrived at 8 p.m., Deluxe was bustling with the Saturday-night crowd. But with a reservation, we were quickly whisked

to our table. There, wedged between a couple scooping up Dylan Moore's gingery, chicken-and-garlic-stuffed monsoon dumplings (\$8) and a party of women declining the vanilla- and blueberry-laced trifle (\$6), we ordered glasses of wine. Although Deluxe mixes potent cocktails next door at Delite, its mostly-by-the-glass, boutique wine list is the better choice for dinner.

Drinks in hand, we picked up the menu. Moore, whose grandmother owns the popular Southern brunch spot Lucile's Creole Cafe, spent the 1990s working at Stars Restaurant, one of San Francisco's most upscale California cuisine restaurants. And his current menu, which is largely the same as the one he opened with in 2003, reflects his love of urban style and international flavors. We ordered an appetizer of Chinese slow-roasted baby back ribs (\$9), a salad of light greens and cherry tomatoes (\$5), and the Mediterranean-flavored pan-roasted halibut (\$26). We were still savoring the tender ribs, sticky with hoisin five-spice glaze, when our salads arrived. But we were not to be rushed. We lingered over the sweet ribs and the salad's tart balsamic vinaigrette. Moore likes concentrated flavors, and several of his dishes—like the salad, as well as his dumplings and sweet pork tenderloin with hot chipotle barbecue sauce (\$18)—spotlight a dominant flavor (balsamic vinegar, tangy ginger, spicy chipotle). The punchy flavors lose their edge if they are hurried.

Then our halibut arrived. As I pushed my fork into the fish, it gently flaked apart and fell into a broth of olives, tomatoes, capers, and sweet basil. The dish was like a breeze off the Mediterranean coast. I savored it, acknowledging that it was unlike anything else served on the block. While Deluxe's new neighbors tend toward small plates or diner-style dishes heavy with trendy ingredients, Deluxe serves more mature, crafted meals, which have a practiced consistency. The eatery, though, isn't perfect. Its paella is notably flavorless, its once stellar ice cream sandwich comes wrapped in two lackluster chocolate cookies, and it hasn't quite figured out how to shake a smooth cocktail.

Dinner at Deluxe, though, is a swanky night out, yet reasonably priced. After a movie at the Mayan, drop in for late-night drinks and small plates at the bar. For birthdays and anniversaries, make a reservation, order a reserve bottle of wine and three courses, and finish with port. I've penciled Deluxe in for both occasions, and my L.A. dress couldn't be happier.

—KAZIA JANKOWSKI