



Dinner at Babcock Ranch's "Table and Tap"



Babcock Ranch Punta Gorda FL

Babcock Ranch (BR) is a residential and commercial development in Southwest Florida consisting of approximately 18,000 acres. Half of this area will be devoted to greenways, lakes and parks and less than 10 percent for commercial use; the remainder will be used for residential development.

BR also has an accompanying nature preserve that has an area 4 times greater than that being developed. BR prides itself on sustainability. This is being accomplished in a number of ways and I will discuss the highlights here. Water conservation is achieved through limiting grass cover in residential areas and the use of grey water for irrigation. Homes are made energy efficient by following guidelines from the Florida Green Building Coalition.

Probably the hallmark of BR is their use of solar energy to provide power to the community. In a partnership with FPL, BR has installed about 350,000 solar panels on almost 400 acres of land. This mode of power generation will be supplemented with natural gas when necessary. Though not costing residents less than more commonly generated types of power, it is derived from much greener technology. Savings on energy in BR will come primarily from energy efficient construction methods.



*Executive Chef David
Rashty*

Sustainability will also extend from and into the culinary aspects of BR. These efforts will be led by Executive Chef David Rashty. Chef Rashty is a graduate of the International Culinary Center in Manhattan and president of the Southwest Florida chapter of Slow Foods, a group that represents everything fast food is

not. He is a very progressive culinarian, and it was interesting talking to him about his shared vision for BR.

Each residential development in BR will have it's own community garden. In that regard, a farmers market will be held every Thursday from 1-7 PM. The community gardens will also be tied into the elementary school which will open soon and become part of the school's curriculum.

Chef Rashty is in collaboration with UF/IFAS extensions both in Lee and Manatee counties to develop onsite fruit trees and other agricultural production. A composting facility is in the works as well. This will be made up both of a horticultural and vegetable (table scrap) nature to facilitate a "zero-waste" food and beverage operation that is planned to eventually exceed 500,000 square feet of space in total.

A package store, Slaters's, will open soon in BR's first marketplace providing packaged and prepared foods in addition to beverage offerings.



Table and Tap restaurant

The first restaurant at BR, Table and Tap (TT), has been open now almost 2 months. TT can accommodate up to 150 diners in either indoor or outside dining areas and is open to the public. Chef Rashty was kind enough to invite me and a dining companion to sample some of TT's fare, gratis.

Having tried some of his cooking at his previous kitchen, Jack's Farm to Fork, I knew we would be in for a real treat. "How hungry are you?" Chef Rashty asked. "Starving!" we replied.



Miso braised pork belly with cherry bourbon glaze

We would come to regret our words, especially by the time the many courses including dessert were served to us. The first three dishes were from the appetizer menu. The first item served was a sous vide red miso braised pork belly with a sour cherry, bourbon glaze. This was fantastic, with a very high quality piece of Niman Ranch pork belly perfectly cooked and an equally great sauce. Mizuna micro greens sealed the deal.

The fried goat cheese was next. Balls of goat cheese are breaded in Panko crumbs and deep fried. These are served with hazelnuts, a champagne vinaigrette and drizzled with honey produced at BR and more mizuna micro greens another great dish.



Butternut squash soup with pears and pear cream

Butternut squash soup followed, served with pear bits and pear cream as a garnish. A good dish and a nice presentation with the heirloom china that it was served to us in.

A couple of items off the salad menu were sampled. Fortunately, from now until the end of our meal, the items served to us were either shared or pared down to a tasting portion.

The roasted beet salad was next, and a bit different version of a signature dish from this chef. Red and golden beets were topped with hazelnuts, goat cheese, a hazelnut vinaigrette and nasturtium as well as sunflower micro greens. Very, very good and highly recommended.

We also tried an off menu spinach salad with warm bacon dressing, walnuts and grilled pear slices. The sugars in the fruit very much complemented the bacon dressing. It was also good.



*Orecchiette with duck confit, cherry tomatoes, zucchini,
peas and Parmesan cheese*

After many deep breaths, a few entree items followed. A Meyer lemon duck confit with orecchiette was first, with cherry tomatoes, zucchini, peas and Parmesan cheese. The orecchiette (small ears) were cooked perfectly al dente. I thought the citrus note here interesting but the dish was a bit too salty for me.

Duck breast was next, cooked perfectly and served with curried corn puree, fingerling potatoes and smoked beets. This was an excellent dish, though the beets were a bit over smoked. That being said, I love duck and all the other flavors in this dish melded together perfectly.

An off menu special, grilled veal chop, finished the entree items. Veal is probably at the moment one of the least PC meats one can order, but was sourced from a producer using humane animal husbandry methods through Grand Western meats. This was one of the best veal chops I have ever had, a 12 oz. portion and just like *buttah*. Served with pureed parsnips and roasted potatoes, my dining companion and I savored every bite!



Chocolate raspberry key lime tart

We finished with a key lime tart. This was different than most and had a chocolate/raspberry crust; the key lime filling flavored with tequila. The flavors in this dessert were interesting and a nice ending to an over the top repast.

I wanted to take a look at TT's kitchen. It was for the most part well put together and well staffed. I was also given a demo of Chef Rashty's hand held smoker, "The Smoking Gun". This item was interesting but I smelled like a victim of a hickory forest fire after walking out of the kitchen. All in a days work.

Table and Tap is an excellent restaurant and is a vanguard in it's location. The food is prepared by a very competent chef from, when possible, locally sourced ingredients. Even better, the vast majority of price points are between six and seventeen dollars for any one menu item.

As perhaps a harbinger of things to come, they recently had a Founder's Day event which 20,000 people attended and the food trucks that were there sold out in less than two hours. With everything that is planned for the development, many culinary searchlights will no doubt be shining very brightly from BR.

It's a wrap for another post on Forks.

Table and Tap
42680 Crescent Loop Rd.
Punta Gorda, FL 33982

(941)235-6906

Website

Accepts all major credit cards; kid's meals served, open daily 11-10 PM; Sunday brunch from 10-4 PM starting soon, please inquire.

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Peter Horan, [Southwest Florida Forks](#), posted on [SouthFloridaReporter.com](#), April 21, 2017

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