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This restaurant in New Port Richey is serving up seriously good food

Restaurant review: The Estuary, from Little Lamb chef James Renew, delights with creative dishes in a welcoming downtown New Port Richey setting.



A strip steak is served with a black garlic demi-glace sauce at The Estuary in downtown New Port Richey. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

By

- **Helen Freund** *Times staff*

Published Yesterday|Updated Yesterday

NEW PORT RICHEY — Almost every Sunday, James Renew gets a call from the owners over at Lost Coast Oyster Company.

They'll tell him where in Florida they're [sourcing their oysters](#) from that week: salty bivalves from Indian River Oyster Co. over in New Smyrna Beach, perhaps, or from Treasure Coast Shellfish, just south of the Sebastian Inlet.

It's the same with Tanner Kauffman of Theo's Harvest, a New Port Richey farmer who calls Renew on Mondays with the current supply. One week, it's lettuce and root vegetables. Another week, it might be starfruit. Then there are the mushrooms, from Maple Brook Mushroom Company in Lutz, and microgreens plucked from a handful of local farms.

As the executive chef and owner of The Estuary, Renew sources locally when he can. But that's not the sole focus. Rather, Renew's approach emphasizes quality of ingredients, sustainability

and seasonality. Coupled with the chef's creative whimsy, the menu here can change quite frequently.

It's a welcome reminder that your next great meal can be found in the most unexpected places — in this case, a charming neighborhood restaurant in downtown New Port Richey. And at a time when the schtick of sourcing locally or seasonally in kitchens has taken a backseat to other restaurant trends, dining at the Estuary feels like a familiar return to more thoughtful dining.



Oysters from Indian River Oyster Company are served at The Estuary in downtown New Port Richey. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

It isn't exactly new territory for Renew, who also owns the celebrated Little Lamb Gastropub in Clearwater. Last February, he followed that up with this second restaurant, a modern New American eatery at 6220 Grand Blvd., a corner building in the heart of downtown New Port Richey.

There have been the inevitable growing pains accompanying any restaurant opening, including wooing the New Port Richey audience (the spot is among the more upscale dining options in town), slight shifts in concept (what was initially pitched as a seafood-forward menu now feels more balanced between land and sea) and some adjustments in pricing. But as The Estuary approaches its one-year anniversary, Renew and his team, including chef de cuisine Robert Daugherty, appear to have more than comfortably hit their stride.

Meals here should start with oysters (\$18 for six, always sourced from Florida waters) and the excellent pull-apart house rolls (\$8), which arrive warm from the oven and are served alongside

a smoked chicken butter that's flavored with drippings from smoked chicken bones and tastes every bit as good as it sounds.



Warm house rolls are served with smoked chicken butter and sea salt. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

A zingy lime-and-jalapeno aioli is perfectly suited to puffy, fried crab beignets (\$13), while a spicy spin on shrimp toast (\$16) hits high marks. Plump Gulf shrimp are swathed in a buttery sauce spiked with garlic, tomatoes, fermented chiles and chorizo. Coupled with onions and bell peppers, the rich medley is draped over thick hunks of grilled sourdough bread, a fiery combo of heat and crunch.



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A decadent beef tartare (\$15) is paired with a smoked beef aioli, punctuated with enough shallots and capers to cut through the richness. The tartare tops golden-fried potato cakes (not

unlike the consistency of a latke), and everything is tucked beneath a shower of finely shaved Parmesan.

Though the menu here is distinct from the Little Lamb, there are a few dishes that proved popular enough to grace both locations, albeit with some small tweaks. The crowd-pleasing fried cauliflower (\$11) makes an appearance, but arrives with the bronzed florets flecked with almonds and sitting in a tangy labneh (like a Greek yogurt), which helps temper some of the plate's inherent sweetness, imbued by a sticky coconut caramel and golden raisins.



Beef tartare on crispy potatoes is served under finely shaved Parmesan. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

And unlike the Little Lamb's casual, gastropub approach, the menu here more closely reflects a traditional appetizer and entree setup — though the portions are generous enough that it's entirely possible to cobble together a meal with a few shared plates.

Still, some of the larger entrees shouldn't be skipped, including a dreamy redfish, which arrives bronzed and crispy-skinned atop a bed of dirty rice (\$30), flavored with a fennel- and garlic-studded shrimp sausage and finished with a citrusy beurre blanc dotted with chive oil. Also very good is the beef coulotte (\$32), where lightly marbled steak arrives fanned out in thick, juicy slices across crackling-crisp smashed potatoes, garlicky rapini and a dark schmear of black garlic on the plate.



A decadent play on shrimp toast features Gulf shrimp swathed in a buttery sauce spiked with garlic, tomatoes, fermented chiles and chorizo. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

For dessert, the kitchen again nods to a Little Lamb staple (and really, why fix it if it ain't broke?): a perfect slice of banana cream pie (\$8), served with a sticky slick of dulce de leche, sweet banana crumble and cloud-like dollops of chantilly cream. It's the perfect pairing to a boozy nightcap like the house Old Fashioned (\$12) — but really, the pie is pretty perfect served all on its own.



An Old Fashioned cocktail is served at The Estuary, in New Port Richey. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

If you go to The Estuary in New Port Richey

Where: 6220 Grand Blvd., New Port Richey. 727-807-5914. www.estuarynpr.com

Hours: Dinner, 4-9 p.m. Sunday and Tuesday-Thursday, Friday and Saturday till 10 p.m.
Brunch, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.

Prices: Appetizers, \$11 to \$16; entrees, \$18 to \$32; desserts, \$7 to \$9.

Don't skip: House rolls, shrimp toast, beef tartare.

Details: Cash and credit card accepted. Reservations recommended. Wheelchair accessible.
Some gluten-free and vegetarian options available.