

True Story - Sam Fox

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In the June 2005 issue of AFM, we named restaurateur Sam Fox one of our Valley V.I.P.'s. Boy, were we right. Since then, Fox has opened several eateries throughout the state, with the newest being Biltmore Fashion Park's True Food Kitchen.



Sam Fox's name has become synonymous with dining in the Valley. Over the past few years, Fox has opened many of our favorite feasting spots (Sauce, Bloom and North, to name a few) and has plans for even more. (Blanco Tacos + Tequila opened in November at The Borgata; and Modern Steak, at Scottsdale Fashion Square, is planned for fall 2009.) In late October, Fox debuted True Food Kitchen at Biltmore Fashion Park, and we were among the first to dig in at this exciting new dining destination.

Though not touted as a health food establishment, it is safe to say that most of True Food's menu items are nourishing, with many ingredients sourced locally and sustainably. Not surprising, especially when you consider that Fox's partner in this dining endeavor is Dr. Andrew Weil, Arizona-based best-selling author and one of the nation's foremost experts in healthy living. Even the wine list features only organic, sustainable (both organic and sustainable varieties feature grapes grown without chemicals) and biodynamic (similar to organic, but all products used in the winemaking process are put back into the land) bottles.

While the fare at True Food is healthful, it is also quite delicious and satisfying. The soup and appetizer menu dishes up many veggie-centric items like local vegetable crudité with tzatziki dipping sauce and a caramelized onion tart with smoked garlic, black figs and gorgonzola, as well as a few seafood starters. The salads are truly unique, with our favorite being the harvest chopped salad, a seasonal item. The colorful conglomeration features apples, walnuts, butternut squash, goat cheese and pomegranate vinaigrette, crowned with bursts of tart pomegranate seeds. And we love that the salad isn't overrun with leafy greens—it is chockfull of the good stuff, meaning the crisp apples, tender squash and melt-in-your-mouth cheese.

We also gobbled up the open-face grilled wild salmon sandwich with shiso, lime, chunks of avocado and cilantro aioli. The fish was flaky—a delish contrast from the creamy avocado and crusty bread. The sandwich, which was substantial enough for a dinner entrée, was paired with a Tuscan kale salad that was finished off with lemon juice, extra-virgin olive oil and Pecorino Toscano cheese. Though the salad acted as a fine side to the flavorful sandwich, it was a little too subdued to order solo (it also appears among the salad offerings). The steak tacos, topped with avocado and tomatillo salsa, were likewise yummy save the slightly soggy tortilla. The accompanying Anasazi beans were delectable and a welcome relief from refried varieties.

The dessert menu lists several chocolaty and fruity options. We enjoyed the banana-chocolate tart with a mesquite flour crust and Brazil nuts. Since the crust was a tad dry, a helping of ice cream would have made the already delish dish even better. Other somewhat guilt-free sweets include a flourless chocolate cake, an apple-cranberry crumble and a few uniquely flavored fruity frozen yogurts and sorbets.

What's more is that True Food pays extra special attention to an area that many eateries tend to forget about: non-alcoholic drinks. Sure, you can get a soft drink or an iced tea anywhere, but True Food uses the juice of freshly squeezed fruits and vegetables to make 10 or so "natural refreshments." They have the thoughtful presentation of a cocktail (you can even get a shot of organic vodka added if you'd like) and none of the chalkiness associated with health drinks. The piña colada is a cooling medley of pineapple and apple juices and coconut milk, and because it isn't too sweet, it can be sipped with your meal. The Medicine Man—a blend of olivello juice, pomegranate juice, cranberry juice, black tea, soda water and muddled blueberries—is rich in antioxidants and flavor.

Though the food and drink alone make diners feel refreshed—the entire industrial-meets-earthy design of True Food is quite revitalizing. The sun-colored walls and booths, grass-lined patio and pale wood floors make for a cheery atmosphere while the sleek silver chairs, dropped pendant lighting and exposed warehouse-style ceiling are decidedly cool. With such stunning interiors and incredible, good-for-you-eats, would we say True Food Kitchen is our new favorite in Fox's restaurant repertoire? We think so.