

# BLUE



SURF CITY

**FOOD:** Eclectic New American

**AMBIENCE:** Open, airy; noisy when crowded

**SERVICE:** Friendly and immensely professional

**WINE LIST:** BYO

**DINNER FOR TWO:** \$94

**HOURS:** Daily, 5:30 to 10 PM

AX, D, DC, MC, V &

1016 Long Beach Boulevard, Surf City (Long Beach Island)  
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Last February, Steve Cameron of Blue was one of three New Jersey chefs nominated for a James Beard award as Best Chef: Mid-Atlantic. (The others were Maricel Presilla of Cucharamama in Hoboken and Joe Romanowski of Bay Avenue Trattoria in Highlands.) Anyone who tried to make a reservation at Blue that winter day discovered that the first available table would be

5:30 on a Saturday evening—in May. Blue is open only from early May to mid-September. Catch it while you can.

Blue was launched by two Philadelphians who met while surfing at Harvey Cedars. Bruno Pouget at the time owned the Caribou Cafe in Philly. Todd Rodgers worked for him before they opened Blue on Easter Sunday in 1998. In November they will open Noble American Cookery on Sansom Street in Philly's Rittenhouse Square, with Cameron, 33, a native Kansan, as executive chef. Blue will reopen in Surf City next May.

There's a smattering of surf photography on the restaurant's walls, which serve as a rotating gallery for local artists. It's an airy, open space patrolled by servers whose easy manner belies their professionalism and deep knowledge of the menu.

They start you off with crusty sourdough bread and rich, sweet butter while you scan a menu that is, literally, all over the map.

There are *mole verde* and morel fettuccini, Spanish mackerel and Atlantic longfin squid. But Cameron is as adept with Barne-gat Light scallops (harvested off Long Beach Island) as he is with quinoa, the South American protein-rich grain. Its fluffy texture



makes it a suitable rice substitute, but Cameron offers it as a side, "finishing it like risotto" with Parmesan, chicken stock, and a scallion purée that turns the delicious mix an alluring shade of green.

The woody richness of pan-roasted squab was offset by a jus of fresh-squeezed orange and roasted squab stock, with arbequina olives added in the pan. A spring roll filled with confit of pigeon leg and duck fat, and bitter South American chocolate, rounds out the dish with sweetness and crunch. A delicate lobster soufflé was anchored by a base of lobster purée, a carrot-and-lime sauce with hints of ginger, and a chunk of tail meat on top. An appetizer called *vuelve a la vida* ("return to life") is a take on the Veracruz shrimp cocktail (and noted hangover cure) made with poached shrimp, avocado, thinly sliced red onion, and a bracing hit of lime.

After learning that orange soda is sometimes added to traditional cocktail sauce, Cameron concocted a Boylan's orange soda foam and a homemade catsup; the deconstructed cocktail is served over corn tortillas as a whimsical but tasty taco.

Blue should dial back

**TRUE BLUE:** Roasted squab with olives (left) and sturgeon and sweetbreads in a lemon-butter lentil sauce. (Don't call it surf-n-turf.)



the innovation, however, on the baby romaine chowder, a salad with poached clams, fried croutons, and a thick buttermilk dressing. The hot chowder weighed down and wilted the romaine. Poached clams and soggy lettuce do not a pleasing combination make.

Order scallops. Barnegat Light produces some of the best in the world, and Blue gets them fresh off the boat. The accompaniments change as fresh produce becomes available, but it's no discredit to the kitchen that the fish will outshine whatever it's paired with. Even an inventive potato salad with crème fraîche, crawfish tails, and a touch of lemon took a back seat to scallops that were flawless, and flawlessly seared.

In a wry take on what the chef declines to call surf-and-turf, grilled California sturgeon was nestled against pan-fried sweetbreads in a lemon-butter French lentil sauce that complemented both. A 12-ounce grass-fed ribeye topped with a taleggio fritter was underwhelming—but a restaurant wedged between an ocean and a bay is not the place to order steak. If you must stick to land, order the braised veal breast stuffed with bacon, herbs, and garlic, served with that delicious quinoa.

Cameron's desserts are often savory and over-serious, like chocolate cake with diced, sweetened tomatoes that raised eyebrows but not flavor or texture. There's no lack of ambition on the dessert list, or anywhere else, and the only thing to be blue about is that Blue's season is so short.—STAN PARISH