

Papercity

August 8, 2016

James Brock

Tacos and Pasta: This Houston Restaurant Weeks Menu is a Refined, Diverse Treat



This is Texas at Vallone's.

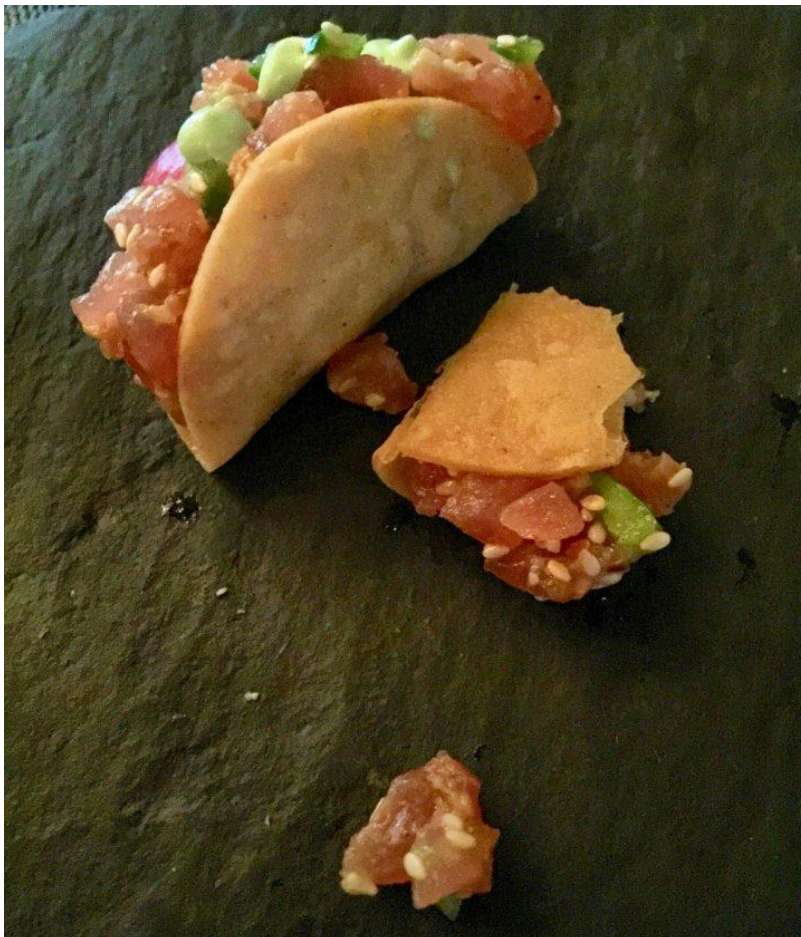
It has begun: Houston Restaurant Weeks is under way, and James Brock is dining around town, sampling some of the menus and courses on offer. It's a great way to help the Houston Food Bank feed the hungry, and, if you do your homework and make reservations on time, get into some great dining rooms at a lower cost than you might otherwise.

<http://www.papercitymag.com/culture/houston-restaurant-weeks-vallones-top-menu-refined-service/>

Want to host a Houston Restaurant Weeks dinner in refined yet relaxed surroundings, complete with a great wine list from which to choose and service that impresses? Earlier this week I visited Vallone's, and that's exactly what I experienced.

I started with one of my favorite dishes of the moment: ahi tuna tacos. You'll appreciate the crisp of the homemade taco, and the tuna is a top-notch one (sushi-grade, of course). There's some jalapeño in the mix, along with wasabi cream and wasabi tobiko (flying fish roe), and sesame oil and seeds. If you want, you can probably finish one of these off in one bite, but I'd advise against doing so.

Savor it, make it last three bites, or at least two, and ask for a glass of the 2014 Massolino Moscato d'Asti (\$15 a glass) to pair with your tacos. Bright, a wonderfully balanced sweetness, and bubbles that lift the tuna and wasabi. (One of my tacos lacked the full crunchiness the other one boasted, but that is a quibble hardly worth mentioning.)



For your next course, select the corn raviolini. Corn is in season, the pasta is delicate and house-made, and you'll discern a slight taste of sage truffle essence. This is rich and light at the same time, a dichotomy that works extremely well. As with the tacos, I let these play on my palate for a while ... and drank a 2014 Pieropan Soave Classico (\$12 a glass) — it's drinking nicely, and it's crisp and possesses intriguing vegetal notes.



We are in Texas, of course, and I finished this HRW menu with something that brought a smile to my face. It's called The Tex: two cheese enchiladas and a six-ounce center-cut filet. It does speak of the state, and its cuisine, in a whimsical way. And it's good. I am more of a ribeye person, but those of you who like tender, melt-in-your-mouth beef should order this. It came to the table hot and full of flavor; whoever seasoned it had been trained well — no additional salt required.

You know what I did? I sliced a small piece of the filet, then speared a piece of the enchilada and ate them together, something I've never done before but something I will definitely do again. Spicy, meaty, comforting. I paired a 2010 Palazzo "Right Bank" with this (\$19 for a three-ounce pour), a wine Robert Parker awarded 96 points. It's mostly Merlot, with some Cabernet Franc (20 percent) and Cabernet Sauvignon (8 percent) also in the bottle. This is a big wine, and it married with The Tex in a sexy way.



Of course, the wines are optional, but if your dinner is a special one, go with these selections and make it an evening at Vallone's. For dessert, I had a few pieces of cheese, but you should go the full route and order the Midnight Cake (\$4 supplement) and a piece of the Snowball Cake.

<http://www.papercitymag.com/culture/houston-restaurant-weeks-vallones-top-menu-refined-service/>