



TEMECULA WINE COUNTRY

HIGH ON A HILL

SAVOR THE VIEW AND THE
CUISINE AT THE PINNACLE,
FALKNER WINERY'S
HILLTOP RESTAURANT.

TEXT: DAVID COHEN

IMAGES: TRINA GONZALEZ

WITH SUCH A KILLER VIEW above the Temecula Valley at the Pinnacle Restaurant at Falkner Winery, you'd forgive the kitchen if the food didn't quite measure up to the ambiance. But you need not fret about that here. Under the sure hand of Chef Jason Barradas, the menu easily stands on its own, with a slew of dishes that are part Mediterranean and part Wine Country. The restaurant uses vegetables from local farms and lots of seafood and pastas. The menu is separated into small plates, large plates, sandwiches and burgers, and entrees. Portions are generous and all ingredients are impeccably fresh.

Start with the herb-encrusted Hokkaido scallops imported from Japan, served atop an artichoke lemon risotto. Also never pass on a creamy mushroom soup that includes porcinis, the king of mushrooms with earthy intense flavors that emanate from the bowl, which also contains portobello mushrooms.

The Maine lobster roll is everything you'd expect with the exception of the roll itself, which is served on a toasted hoagie roll rather than the classic New England hot dog shaped white bread slice with crust. The lobster is plentiful (three to four ounces) and it's blessedly not over-mayonnaised, while the shreds of lemon-licorice flavored tarragon leaves are a perfect accompaniment.

The lobster mac & cheese, twice showcased in *Sunset* magazine, incorporates generous

chunks of fresh lobster, sautéed garlic and shallots and a three-cheese blend consisting of brie, Parmesan and havarti which is tossed with hot orecchiette (ear-shaped pasta). Applewood-smoked bacon pieces add to the allure of this beautifully conceived version, which puts most others to shame.

Ray's Famous Black Angus burger is named after the owner of the winery and restaurant, and it's one of the finest burgers I've had the pleasure of devouring. You can order it as a one-third pound or half-pound behemoth, topped with melted Monterey Jack cheese and sautéed mushrooms. Cooked to a perfect medium rare, this moist and meaty 100 percent Angus burger is an ode to simplicity, which allows the beef's intrinsic flavor to shine through. You may need to unhinge your jaw to get your mouth around it, but it's so worth the effort.

One of the more intriguing items is the grilled octopus entree. Two baby octopus tentacles, which are initially braised in bouillon and charred on the grill, are placed atop tiny Israeli couscous with sliced baby heirloom tomatoes, assorted bell peppers, basil and crumbled Mexican chorizo blended with smoked paprika oil. The rendered fat of the chorizo mixing with the paprika oil provides a smoky, slightly spicy overtone that makes the whole dish taste even better than the sum of its individual parts.

The final dish of the day was seared salmon atop a melange of vegetables, including sautéed chopped baby bok choy, baby heirloom tomatoes and roasted marble potatoes, all drizzled with a piquant red wine vinegar and sweet hibiscus reduction. This is similar to a dish you might find in Provence, with a bit of Asian influence thrown in for good measure.

Pasta fans will enjoy the wild mushroom and grilled chicken pasta or the spicy Catalan prime steak pasta.

Finish with cookies and cream dessert with maple bourbon ice cream, and then take a 15 minute nap to recharge your batteries...sitting upright, of course.

Don't forget, the Pinnacle Restaurant is part of a winery, and owner Ray Falkner or his staff will be happy to suggest wines to pair with assorted dishes. The syrah was awesome with the burger and the viognier or chardonnay both work well with the octopus. Either lobster dish goes splendidly well with the sauvignon blanc.

The Pinnacle at Falkner Winery

40620 Calle Contento, Temecula
(951) 676-8231, falknerwinery.com

Cuisine: Mediterranean/Wine Country

Open: Lunch daily 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Extras: Outdoor seating available. Private parties in the downstairs barrel room. Catering, weddings.

**OWNER RAY FALKNER OR HIS STAFF
WILL BE HAPPY TO SUGGEST WINES TO
PAIR WITH THE DISHES.**



Dishes to try include Grilled Octopus (previous page) and Seared Salmon (this page, above). At right: Ray Falkner, owner.

