

The Front Yard: Exquisite Food in a Playful Environment



by Jill Weinlein - Travel and Restaurant Reviewer in Chef Chris Turano, North Hollywood, The Front Yard, The Garland Tags: California Cuisine, Hotel-Restaurant

The patio at The Front Yard restaurant at the Garland Hotel in North Hollywood twinkles with strings of lights near a cozy fireplace and comfortable seating. It was slightly toasty on the evening we visited, with So Cal enduring a heat wave, so we opted for the air-conditioned interior.

The former space of Warren's Blackboard located at the 1970s-era hotel named after the legendary Hollywood actress, Beverly Garland, was acquired by her son, James, who took over the property and expanded The Garland into a sophisticated hotel with a new restaurant. He hired executive chef Chris Turano, from the Bacara Resort in Santa Barbara, to helm the kitchen, and the hospitable and friendly Mario Leal-Cruz, Jr. as general manager.

The decor mixes a chic interior with hints of the 1970s throughout, including macrame geometric wall hangings and contemporary grass-cloth wallpaper. Glass globe lights hang in the dining room under a thick plaster ceiling that looks like whipped buttercream frosting.

As the temperature cooled, the windows were opened, revealing the sycamore trees outside.

The menu includes Turano's hand crafted small bites, starters, flatbreads, salads, main courses, share plates and side dishes that are inspired by cultural delights found around the world.

The wine list offers a variety of bubbly from France, Napa and Sonoma. A selection of lighter and aromatic white and rosé wines from the Central Coast and Napa are also available. I chose a glass of Solace rosé made in Napa from 100 percent syrah with a pleasing light rose color with a delicate aroma of peach, strawberry and watermelon. My husband ordered a cucumber press cocktail made by head bartender Will Cutting. The cocktail is made with Bulldog gin, lime juice, cilantro, cucumber and Combiér pamplemousse — a grapefruit flavored triple sec. It is an ideal drink for a hot summer day or evening.

On Sunday and Monday, the Front Yard offers free corkage; a \$20 corkage fee is charged on all other days. Most of the wines on the menu are priced from \$40 to \$50.



Chef Chris Turano, mixologist Will Cutting and friendly GM Mario Leal-Cruz Jr.

Turano is from Chicago and said he loves cooking in California.

“It’s like being a kid in a candy store,” Turano said, who added that he has worked in kitchens since he was a young boy.

He orders fresh produce from farmers’ markets and fresh fish. Turano arrives at 9 a.m. and usually leaves at 1 a.m., and said he is committed to making the restaurant succeed.

One of the personable servers, Chloe, recommended the smooth and not too garlicky green garbanzo hummus with sliced flatbread. The bread is infused with Greek yogurt and chives. I enjoyed the flavors of olive oil, fresh lemon zest and sumac in the slightly citrusy dip with a hint of spiciness.

Next, we enjoyed Turano’s creamy burrata toast with sliced farmers market peaches on ciabatta bread. The pickled chilies from Suzy’s Farms in San Diego give it a smack of heat.

Chef Turano is an expert at preparing seafood, with specialties such as grilled red wine glazed octopus with pickled ramp aioli, spiced crisp chickpeas and radish salad. We also ordered his wild halibut entrée. Turano butchers the 30-pound fish himself and prepares the pure white meat with three types of cauliflower. The halibut is served with blonde gastrique made with chardonnay, butter and sprinkled sugar. The dish is colorful, with small green cauliflower florets and pickled beech mushrooms.

Turano also serves a flatbread with sweet mission figs and slightly salty prosciutto and earthy fennel. Rucola, a Mediterranean leaf from the mustard family, tops another crispy flatbread with fresh ricotta white sauce, making it full of flavor.

We enjoyed the tempura broccolini dipped and flash fried in rice flour batter. It’s different than true tempura and less oily. The ponzu sauce is gluten free and infused with lemon oil and furikake — a dry Japanese seasoning made with dried and ground fish, sesame seeds, chopped seaweed, sugar and salt.

Turano roasts organic Mary’s chicken and makes his own pasta. His chicken is served with Parisian gnocchi on a bed of whole sweet pea puree with pea tendrils and natural jus enhanced with fresh herbs. It’s exquisite.

Turano also serves another house-made pasta dish with light linguine and fresh dungeness crab, fava beans, aji amarillo and lemon. The fresh seafood is enhanced with a light sauce to bring out the flavors.

We finished with a grasshopper espresso brownie made with delicious mint chocolate chip ice cream. Turano also makes panna cotta with ginger and compressed pineapple

served with cabernet blackberry sorbet. The most photogenic dessert was salted caramel pudding served in a jam jar, and surrounded by freshly popped salted caramel popcorn.

After dinner, we visited the resort's store featuring California wines, specialty cookbooks, gifts and travel essentials hand-picked by Beverly Garland's daughter, Carrington Goodman.

The Front Yard, a playful and inviting dining spot in the Valley, is open for breakfast, brunch, lunch and dinner. \$\$ 4222 Vineland Ave. (818)255-7290.

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