

Vail Daily

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HighLife

VAILDAILY SECTION B

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BLOCK 16 brings NAPA to VAIL

Seasonal cuisine in an unpretentious atmosphere makes this one of Vail's hottest new places to eat

By Lauren Glendenning
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VAIL — Farm to table is the theme of Block 16's menu — Chef Sergio Howland wants everything to be as fresh and seasonal as possible, and by the taste of it, he's already succeeding.

Howland came to Vail from an executive chef position in Panama, and prior to that, he worked in Los Cabos, Mexico. His experience is truly international, as Spain, Napa, Calif., and Miami are also on his resume.

In Vail, Howland wants guests to enter the dining room and feel at home. The place is cozy, and while it's fine dining, there's no pretentiousness or stuffiness here — just really good food.

The menu keeps seasonal ingredients in the spotlight, with an early-winter menu that consists of a lot of citrus, such as blood orange and tangerines, and a late-winter menu bringing things such as fava beans and peas back to center stage.

"The menu will change every three months or so, as the seasons change," Howland said.

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The Maine lobster salad at Block 16 is served with blood orange, mango, frisee and a citrus emulsion.



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The dining room of Block 16 features an impressive wine tower in the center of the room that holds the eatery's red-wine selection.

if you go ...

What: Block 16.
Fare: Farm-to-table; Napa Valley-inspired.
Address: Located inside The Sebastian hotel, 16 Vail Road, Vail Village.
Phone number: 970-477-8050.
Website: www.thesebastianvail.com/vail-restaurants-bars/block-16-restaurant.
Hours: Dinner served nightly from 6 to 10 p.m.
Kids' menu: Yes. Entrees from \$8 to \$10.
Entrees: From \$29 to \$38.
Tasting menu: \$95 per person or \$115

per person with wine pairings.
Reservations: Not required.
Additional information: Complimentary valet parking at The Sebastian is provided.
Must try:

- Maine lobster salad with blood orange, mango, citrus emulsion and extra-virgin olive oil, \$16.
- Sonoma artisan foie gras, pan-seared with black mission figs and tawny port reduction, \$16.
- "Mar y Montana," Maine lobster and braised veal cheeks with merlot reduction, \$35.

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Howland's creations bring you right to the places that inspired his dishes. An innovative lobster salad, for instance, with mango puree, blood orange, asparagus and extra-virgin olive oil, makes you feel like you're dining on an outdoor terrace overlooking the beach somewhere in the Caribbean. It also makes you want to lick your plate clean.

A porcini mushroom risotto with hazelnut oil brings you straight to Italy, as if an Italian grandmother just picked the mushrooms herself and then cooked this dish for you in her rustic home.

Howland isn't afraid to think outside the box, either. His menu offers more than your standard fish and steak dishes.

The "Mar y Montana," for example, pairs Maine lobster with braised veal cheeks coated with a sweet-yet-savory merlot reduction.

Milk-fed lamb shoulder with a white bean and rosemary puree, pancetta, fava beans and glazed cippolini onions also showcases Howland's creativity.

The vino

With a Napa-inspired restaurant, there's an obvious emphasis on wine at Block 16. This is the kind of place where skipping wine with dinner would be almost criminal.

The restaurant's name, Block 16, refers to a block of the best grapes in a vineyard. When a restaurant is named after wine, you must indulge.

As you enter the dining room, a huge floor-to-ceiling wine cellar is the centerpiece of the room. The wine is visible from every table, and Howland wants people to drink it.



The food couldn't be more wine-inspired. He knows the magic wine and food can make when paired correctly, which is why the tasting menu and wine pairing option is downright harmonious.

And if you're not up for a multi-course dinner and several glasses of wine, make sure to ask Manager Gary Obligation to pair something for you with any dish you're trying. The Inniskillin ice wine, for example, compliments Howland's pan-seared foie gras perfectly. When you take a bite of the slightly crispy foie gras and swirl the wine around in your mouth afterwards, you'll see why this is one of many pairings that has been created by professionals.

Block 16 also hosts a monthly winemaker's dinner for \$125 per person. Each month, a vintner selects wines to pair with a five-course dinner created specifically to compliment the wine. This month's dinner is April 6 during the annual Taste of Vail, featuring wines by Margerum Wine Co.

The Vail Daily does not print restaurant reviews but, rather, restaurant features. We cannot guarantee you will have the same experience that we did. Community Editor Lauren Glendenning can be reached at lglendenning@vaildaily.com.



TOP: The scallop and pork belly dish at Block 16 is served with a spring-pea broth and mushrooms.

LEFT: Block 16's red-velvet cake with cream-cheese sorbet in the Sebastian Hotel in Vail.

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