

**EXCLUSIVE ADVANCE EXCERPT: THE PALEY'S PLACE COOKBOOK**

*Northwest*

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# *palate*

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST



# The Saint Social Club

1416 East Olive Way, Seattle, WA

206-323-9922, [thesaintsocialclub.com](http://thesaintsocialclub.com)

★ WA Many of Seattle's recently opened restaurants have one thing in common: you can get a good meal for \$10–\$15.

One of the best of these new places is The Saint Social Club, a Capitol Hill spot featuring 80 tequilas and organic Mexican food.

The turquoise and white building used to be a hot 'n' greasy chicken wings joint, but now the cool interior is hung with vintage black and white toreador portraits from old magazines.

Far from the heavy, cheesy platters of Mexican food that are rampant in Seattle, the food here is light, fresh, and mostly organic. A plate of hand-cut *totopos* (chips) has guacamole with three from-scratch salsas—a verde, a spicy red, and a pico de gallo. Twenty-one ingredients make up the mole sauce that flavors tender free-range chicken, served with sides of beans, rice, lime, greens, and crisp radish. The big bowl of posole is an astutely seasoned soup of hominy, pork, and chicken with fresh greens on top. None of these will rip your head off with heat, relying instead on flavor and nuance.

Part of the fun at The Saint is trying the tequilas, which are served as sippers, not slammers or shooters. There are 80 kinds of tequila, ranging from \$7–\$125 a shot. They start with blancos (bottled right after distilling), wind through reposadas (aged for two months to a year), and top out with a slew of amber añejos (aged more than a year in white oak, which makes for complex, mellowed flavors). To get acquainted, order a flight to try one of each style from a single maker.



Tequila in many forms is a feature of The Saint. These fresh strawberries are steeped in Patrón Silver tequila for 21 days.

Tequila cocktails are handmade with fresh juices, house-concocted infusions and syrups such as honey and blue agave, plus affable touches like elderflower or rosewater. For the “Fresas” cocktail, fresh strawberries are steeped in Patrón Silver tequila for 21 days. Like the tequilas, the cocktails come in flights of three.

Dinner served daily from 5pm–2am, weekend brunch from 10am–2:30pm.

—Alicia Comstock Arter

## Aura

680 Montreal St., Victoria, B.C.

250-386-8721, [aurarestaurant.ca](http://aurarestaurant.ca)

★ BC Contemporary chic defines Aura, the new restaurant at the Inn at Laurel Point. The much-anticipated renovation reveals a light and airy room with floor-to-ceiling windows and expansive patio, providing spectacular Inner Harbor views.

Chef Brad Horen heads up an equally modern menu with Japanese nuances echoing the hotel's collection of Asian art and artifacts. After taking Calgary's Catch restaurant to four-diamond status, and garnering a chef-of-the-year accolade, Horen is promising to inject Aura with the same dazzling sparkle. His innovative yet classically-based cooking will help that along.

Wonton-crusting prawns are a prime example. Delicate prawn meat is the prize beneath a crunchy exterior, and the accompanying togarashi dipping sauce works magic with both textures. Togarashi, a multi-spice blend that includes chilli and orange peel, flavors AAA Alberta beef, seared and sliced over a grilled romaine salad with new potatoes and green beans. A warm vinaigrette done à la minute



SHELORA SHELDAN PHOTO

with tomatoes and kalamata olives provides a tangy bass note to this delicious lunch choice.

Minestrone soup presented in a French press and poured tableside is sheer fun, and what Horen calls “war paint”—a thick blend of miso and black olives—is slashed across plates, providing a salty hit for chicken karaage and the sautéed calamari salad.

An entrée of rack of lamb is paired with an off-the-bone shank luxuriating in a rosemary-brown butter sauce. The richness is balanced

**Chef Brad Horen melds Japanese flavors with Northwest ingredients at Aura.**

by perfectly cooked vegetables and Israeli couscous intermingled with peas.

Do not skip dessert. Pastry chef Nicky Frohman's creative lemongrass-infused panna cotta is swathed in thin slices of fresh mango, and artfully presented with a candied citrus salad, a “bomb” of Campari encased in white chocolate, and deep-fried mango ice cream.

The wine list emphasizes the best of the Island and B.C., with plenty of handpicked gems from Washington, Oregon, and the Old World. A separate lounge area provides craft brews and a shaken, stirred, and muddled cocktail list both trendy and classic. Come bask in Aura's glow soon.

Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Sunday brunch from 10am–2pm.

—Shelora Sheldon