



BY THE SEA

CATCH'S CHEF GEMMA GRAY SERVES UP A GOURMAND'S DREAM MENU

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE · PHOTO CREDIT LISA ROMEREIN

We are seated beside a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing a gorgeous SoCal sunset and hypnotizing tide — undoubtedly the best seat in Catch, the seafood restaurant inside Casa del Mar hotel. Featuring a neutral palette and clean, contemporary decor, the smell of delicious fare permeates the serene atmosphere. In the center of the small restaurant is a bar housing fresh raw seafood on a bed of ice. In addition to the raw bar options, the seafood-saturated menu boasts appetizers and “Entrées from the Land.”

Everything on the “American Seafood” menu sounds so appetizing that it’s a challenge to choose. I ask for recommendations from our server Michael, who happily offers his expert advice. To start, we order the Asparagus Soup and Grilled Octopus with Pee-Wee potatoes, green beans and Kalamata olives. Butter and a warm loaf of crusty bread are brought to the table on a dark stone slab. Our appetizers arrive elegantly plated. The soup is served in a white creamer which is then poured into a deep white bowl. The thick soup is rich in flavor and satiating, while the octopus

is tender and delicious. Executive Chef Gemma Gray sends out their Dungeness Crab Crostini for us to try. The delectable treat features fresh, plump pieces of crab meat drizzled with aioli. The juxtaposition of the toasted country bread with the light crustacean and mix of contrasting flavors are divine.

The main course, just like the first course, is first-rate. For our entrées, we choose the Day Boat Scallops “A La Plancha” with lemon mascarpone risotto and rosemary and the 16 oz. Ribeye Bone-in Steak, along with sides of the roasted Brussels sprouts and Lobster Mac & Cheese (the latter is compliments of the chef). The creamy risotto complements the tasty scallops nicely, while the steak is a flavorful masterpiece. Again, Chef Gray out does herself. We savor the Lobster Mac & Cheese, which is full of large chunks of lobster in perfectly prepared pasta and velvety cheese. Just as we are finishing up, Chef Gray takes a break from the kitchen to visit our table. The gracious chef asks how our meal is. Everything is incredibly delicious, especially the dishes she sent out on her own, we say, then thank her.

As our plates are cleared away, Michael insists that we order dessert. While we are satisfyingly-full, we concede and order an Espresso Tart and Strawberry Cobbler, along with tea and espresso. The silky texture and sweet filling of the tart hits the spot. As a cobbler enthusiast, I found the warm strawberries fused with the buttery, crumbly topping, and dollop of vanilla ice cream to be absolute perfection.

Manager Diego Sosa checks in with us as the last morsels of dessert are devoured. After we praise the restaurant’s service and adept culinary skills, Diego moves on to the next table (with a bride and groom) to chat with them. Catch’s first-class gourmet cuisine coupled with their welcoming staff, and breathtaking view makes them a prime dining destination. As their moniker implies, the Santa Monica restaurant is certainly a catch. **ML**

Catch is located inside Casa del Mar at 1910 Ocean Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90405. For more information, call 310-581-7714 or visit <https://www.hotelcasadelmar.com/dining/catch>