

CONTRACOSTATIMES

Tips Included: Sidebar opens near Oakland's Lake Merritt

By Lynn Carey

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Opening a restaurant is a little like giving birth; lots of worry and anticipation, decorating the baby's room, some agony and then "... joy, one hopes. And over the past few weeks, Barbara Mulas was going through the excitement-tinged agony part in anticipation of her new restaurant, Sidebar, opening in Oakland.

Despite the last-minute craziness, she's managed to retain her sense of humor.

"We want to be all things to all people," she says with a throaty laugh. To that end, there's a bar in the center of the restaurant; an open kitchen; and a plan to serve simple, fresh food similar to Berkeley's Zax Tavern, which Mulas and her husband, Mark Drazek owned until 2007.

For several years, the couple, along with another Zax veteran, Anne Marie Adrian, had dreamed of opening a restaurant such as Sidebar, which they are calling a "gastro pub."

"We'd been looking around, but when we saw this location, we said, this is it," Mulas says. Sidebar is on Lake Merritt, with a view of the fountains "just like in front of the Bellagio in Las Vegas," she jokes. It's located in the space Trio Bistro operated for more than 30 years.

"The space has a great vibe, but we wanted to make it more our place," Mulas says. Among the changes, the bar in the center is larger, there are now booths in the corner and the entire space has been repainted, relighted and refurnished.

Those booths are perfect for, well, sidebars. "We were looking for a name that was sort of nondescript, and thought about sidebars ... you know, if you pull over and have a little sidebar, a conversation? We want people to have conversations here."

While the customers are conversing, they also can chow down on, say, deviled eggs with Dungeness crab and spicy mustard (\$9), pork chops with cannelloni bean ragout (\$17), oven-roasted Poussin with German butterball potato hash (\$18).

SIDEBAR PRESS

Drazek, the pastry chef, will be making his famous Twice Baked Goat Cheese Souffle (\$8) on Wednesdays. “He’s been making it for 14 years, and decided to just serve it on Wednesdays at Sidebar,” says his wife.

Drazek and Mulas met at the California Cooking Academy about 22 years ago. They live in Oakland, and Mulas can ride her bike to work now. For the first two weeks, Sidebar will serve dinner from 5-10:30 p.m., and plan on serving lunch from 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays after that. On Saturdays, lunch will not be served, but the restaurant will open at 4 p.m. because, as Mulas says, “I often want to eat and drink something at 4 p.m. with a friend. I want to have a sidebar. And now, people will be able to do that.”

Probably not Mulas, though. She’ll be in the kitchen.

542 Grand Ave., Oakland, 510-452-9500, closed Sundays.