

Rudolph's, a Hip Restaurant and Bar, Enlivens the Stylish New Sarasota Modern Hotel

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The restaurant's mod bar. Image: Daniel Perales

If you name your restaurant after a legendary architect, you'd better make sure the space looks sharp. [Rudolph's](#), the restaurant inside [The Sarasota Modern](#) hotel, which opened in the Rosemary District in December, is named in tribute to Paul Rudolph, and its lush environs do justice to a revered name.

The restaurant is divided into three main areas: a brightly lit, glass-walled dining room that offers nighttime street-corner vistas; a moody round bar with an upside-down alligator attached to the ceiling; and a lattice-ceilinged patio adjacent to the pool. Does it follow the strictures of the [Sarasota School of Architecture](#) that Rudolph helped pioneer? You'll have to ask an architecture critic. Authentic or not, it's gorgeous, and the food matches the look.



The "Rudolph's" appetizer marries delicate salmon and beets Image: Daniel Perales

Chef Jennifer Salhoff, who moved to Sarasota last year from Philadelphia, where she oversaw high-end French and Cuban restaurants, designs her plates with an eye for structure and color. The Rudolph's appetizer (\$16) includes swirls of salmon cured with beets plus cubes of vivid roasted beets and a splash of crimson beet purée. It looks like springtime on a plate, and

tastes like it, too, with clean, subtle flavors. A wild boar shank entrée (\$38), meanwhile, looks like a mini-skyscraper, with a tall bone surrounded by tender meat, charred vegetables and a turmeric-yellow cauliflower purée.



Charred octopus over squid ink risotto at Rudolph's at The Sarasota Modern hotel. Image: Daniel Perales

While bright colors are a unifying principle, the flavors draw from around the globe. The menu hops from Southern-fried gator bites (\$11) to a Tuscan kale salad (\$13), with a stopover in Spain for paella (\$40). Pork belly (\$27) nods to Latin America, with its marriage of tamarind, roasted poblano peppers and charred corn. The octopus (\$30), meanwhile, is charred and plated on top of dramatic squid ink risotto and accented with a saffron emulsion and tiny pickled vegetables. “I get bored very easily,” says Salhoff, who grew up in upstate New York and went to art school before getting into

restaurant cooking.

She eventually moved to Manhattan, where she staged at a number of diverse upper-echelon restaurants, and [she even appeared in a season of *Hell's Kitchen*](#), the intense reality show starring noted yeller Gordon Ramsay. She was encouraged to audition. “I have a temper,” she says with a laugh, “and I’m very straightforward.” You have to be “thick-skinned” to get ahead in the culinary world, she says. Being a woman in a male-dominated industry provides even more challenges, but “a chef is a chef. You’ve just got to be stubborn.”



Rudolph's pork belly, served with creamy grits. Image: Daniel Perales

Salhoff's food isn't the only star at Rudolph's, which serves a number of thoughtful \$12 cocktails dreamed up by bartenders Eli Clark-Kramer and

Robert Boyland. “Midnight at the Marina” is dry for a whiskey cocktail, flavored with just rye and three types of bitters, while the “Poolside Gossip” balances vodka, peach liqueur, blueberry syrup, lemon juice, lavender bitters and prosecco. At most hotels, the poolside cocktails are sugary, overpriced dreck. Here, they’re terrific.



A “Poolside Gossip” cocktail. Image: Daniel Perales

What the restaurant lacks so far is buzz. When I ate there in late December, there were few customers. There’s something to be said for a quiet, intimate dinner, but the sumptuous design could use more liveliness to make diners want to linger for dessert or a second round. The price point may also be a challenge. Entrées priced north of \$40 may not be unusual in bigger cities, but they stand out in Sarasota.

There's an upside to a quiet start. Salhoff says it's given her time to play around with the menu and allowed her team to mesh. She moved to Sarasota 16 days before the hotel opened and created the basic starter menu in a rush. Now, she says, she can take her time: "I've got the freedom to do whatever I want."

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