



The Signature Room Unveils New Signature Style

by Matt Kirouac

When Patrick Sheerin left [The Signature Room](#) for more subterranean cooking territory at [Trenchermen](#), there was a big question mark hovering over the John Hancock as to who was going to fill his chef clogs. The answer is Rosalia Barron, restaurant's first female executive chef, and in the short span of time that she's been at the helm, she's managed to completely change the menu and put her own "signature" on it.

During Sheerin's tenure at The Signature Room, food skewed more towards molecular gastronomy and progressive cuisine. He does have a knack for culinary chemistry, after all. But with the appointment of a new chef comes a new era for the restaurant on the 95th floor of the John Hancock building. Her new direction focuses less on the molecular aspect and more on simple composed plates. A quick glance at the menu shows that it's an ingredient-driven menu, featuring dish after dish showcasing primary ingredients and supporting characters. The menu is broken into more familiar, traditional categories, like starters, entrees, and desserts. Each dish features a main component, augmented by a few supplements. It's a return to the basics for the restaurant, and for Barron, it's a return to more traditional American cuisine, which fits perfectly with a skyscraper named after one of America's founding fathers.

Dishes may read and look straightforward, but Barron puts great care into each and every morsel. For starters, the duck trio is an elegant exploration of all things duck, including crispy duck thigh with a skin that crackles like meaty Saltines, seared foie gras, and duck liver mousse so luscious and rich it tastes like duck ice cream. For her humbly named king crab and calamari dish, Barron presents a tasteful terrine of citrus butter-poached squid, herb-flecked potatoes, and teardrop tomatoes. It's nestled alongside a bit of piquant verde sauce and a delicate cluster of lightly fried calamari.

On to entrees, Barron has a deft hand when it comes to seafood. She sears a mean scallop, crusted with a bit of pancetta and served over plump goat cheese gnocchi. Red snapper is seared just enough to create a skin as crispy as a shard of matzo. The fish is served over a ragout-like medley of Provençal white beans and sautéed escarole. When it comes to meat, the motto is go big or go home. And don't you dare go home without scarfing a bit of her Flintstonian



(Duck trio)



(Chorizo-stuffed pork chop)

pork chop, stuffed with enough spicy chorizo to fill a piñata and served with whipped potatoes, roasted corn relish, and ancho sauce. The whole thing is a spicy homage to Southwestern cookery, and with the right forkful, you feel like you're eating a deconstructed taco.

Desserts are pure nostalgia, with options that range from milk and cookies (with a miso butterscotch shake, which is probably a slight divergence from your typical childhood nostalgia) to cranberry-apple cobbler. Be sure and order one of Barron's pies if it's on the menu. The Signature Room works magic with pie crust, developing a crumbly cookie-like richness that is rare in crusts. The current pie is a sweet and tangy strawberry-rhubarb, an early harbinger of spring, complete with a beautiful lattice crust and a scoop of ginger ice cream. If you're craving something super classic, the crème brûlée is a solid choice, with a sugar crust as crisp as stained glass. Across the board, Barron has a way with crusts.

The Signature Room also features a charity of the month, designating a few items off the menu whose proceeds go towards said charity. This month's beneficiary is [Chicago Children's Advocacy Center](#), and the featured dishes are king crab risotto, asparagus and prosciutto salad, spring minestrone soup, grilled lamb porterhouse, and the aforementioned strawberry-rhubarb pie

Under their new chef, The Signature Room is off to a promising new start, serving up simple dishes executed with precision. From the first bite to the last, it's a taste of Americana in the sky.



(Strawberry-rhubarb pie)