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## **The Lark**

*131 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara*

*284-0370, [thelarksb.com](http://thelarksb.com)*

**Hours:** *Tuesday through Sunday,*

*Dinner 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.*

*Bar Only, 10 p.m. to midnight*

The Lark, named for an overnight Pullman train that serviced Santa Barbara for 60 years, sits squarely in the Funk Zone in the old Santa Barbara Fish Market building. There's a communal table and bar where you can get full meals — helpful since chances are good that the booths and tables will be occupied. The interior hints at train car elements with its booths, and ultimately, the rustic look is perfect for the trendy Funk Zone. That the Lark is packed on "off" nights and requires reservations. Their menus rotate seasonally, and this review reflects their fall presentation.

Everything starts with popcorn seasoned with lime, salt, and chili flakes, for a salty heat kick, and though they'll bring you as much as you want, don't over-indulge; save room for everything else. You might consider starting with a signature cocktail like The Bushwick (\$12), which uses Cutler's Artisan Spirits apple pie liqueur (located conveniently next door), maraschino, bitters, and vermouth. This feels inherently like a masculine club drink with a refreshing smokiness, cinnamon, and slightly sweet apple notes, though balanced and unusual for most cocktail menus.

The Fried Olives (\$9) are stuffed with goat cheese and rosemary, topped with a chorizo aioli. The subtle, smoky heat from the aioli is ideal with the crispy thin exterior, creating a great take on bar food. While it lacks actual olive flavor, the creamy cheese and crisp crunch are worth it. The Crispy Brussels Sprouts (\$9) are a mix of Medjool dates, sesame, lime, and garum for a savory element. The result is a dish of great balance and texture, with a sweet note as a counterpoint to the sprouts.

The Caramelized Cauliflower Gratin (\$9) is an instant classic with texture, heat and spice. Gruyere cheese is mixed with preserved lemon, chili flakes, bacon, breadcrumbs and cauliflower, then baked. The absurdly wonderful and flavorful food will sway any anti-veggie diner. The Deviled Eggs (\$5) are three eggs with pancetta, jalapeno, smoked paprika, cr"me fraÛche, and chives. Whereas there are multiple ingredients, the flavors end up being lackluster with the

exception of the pancetta and smoked paprika, making this a weak link in the terrific chain of food here.

More substantial fare includes the Ahi Crudo (\$15) of beautiful, sashimi-grade tuna, topped with a picholine olive tapenade, toasted almonds, grilled cucumber, oregano and kumquat. There is a bright, light texture and flavor profile from the kumquat and though the olive is the more dominant flavor, it's merely placed on top of the fish, therefore easily removed (unless you're a major olive fan), and ultimately, this dish succeeds due to its surprising simplicity. The verdant green purée of spinach, oregano and olive oil acts as an earthy base for the fish.

Their Autumn Kale Salad (\$12) uses pepitas, roasted apples, cider-vinaigrette dressing, pomegranate seeds, thin-sliced radishes, and pecorino cheese. The warm, appealing apple really seals the deal on this blending with the slight bitter quality of the earthy kale; a terrific balance between savory and sweet, vegetable and fruit.

The Roasted Mary's Chicken (\$27/half) is brined, and then air-dried, making it extraordinarily moist. It's served with brown-butter polenta, Brussels sprouts, butternut squash, and a maple-Sherry, chicken juice. The flavor permeates the entire chicken, not merely the skin, causing you to realize how amazing chicken can actually taste. Paired with the sweet squash and a few leaves of crispy sprouts, this is on the pricy side, but is truly a monumental effort.

### **High Points**

Very creative food in a very cool environment, The Lark has laid down new tracks for restaurants in the area. The Cauliflower Gratin and the Roasted Mary's Chicken are a must try.

### **Low Points**

Since they promote plates made for sharing, so if you're not careful, it will run into a pricy meal

**Food: \* \* \* \* 1/2**

**Service: (table) \* \* \* \* 1/2**

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**Overall: \* \* \* \* 1/2, \$\$\$**

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