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 INSIDE: Cheese that should never stand alone. Ten bottles to buy right now. Does wine have a soul? Discuss. EDITED BY SARA DESERAN 10.07

EAT+DRINK BEST BITE



(ABOVE) THE TOUGHEST RESERVATION IN TOWN; (BELOW, FROM LEFT) GENERAL MANAGER TIM STANNARD, CHEF MARK SULLIVAN AND SOMMELIER ANDREW GREEN.

# Grand Opening

IN THE CASE OF SPRUCE, ABSENCE ONLY MADE THE HEART GROW FONDER. BY JESSICA BATTILANA

To say that Spruce's first night was among the most anticipated restaurant events of the year would be a grand understatement—almost as sweeping as the finished space, a converted 1930s garage that has come to dominate a once-sleepy stretch of Sacramento Street. Since the doors opened in August, two years after the originally predicted date, there have been month-long waits for prime-time reservations—testament to the power of advanced warning.

All of this anticipation has set the bar high. With each delay, Spruce crept further into our collective consciousness until we all felt certain we knew what to expect: something fabulous. In part, this was because the restaurant comes with an impressive pedigree, namely the five-man Bacchus Management Group—the people behind Woodside's Village Pub, the Pizza Antica mini-chain and the soon-to-open Vache on Union Street.

It follows, then, that the customers trend toward the posh, many convening nightly in the bar, which is rich in marble and leather. A good option for those who boldly walk in without a reservation, the bar menu

offers the requisite burger but also an herb-and-robriola-cheese omelet (your first tip that chef/partner Mark Sullivan cares about good, simple food). Even for diners in the bar, Spruce aims to provide a class act all around. Every order, down to something as simple as a Caesar salad, comes with an amuse-bouche (beet chips with an herb dip, maybe, or pea-and-mint soup). Try pairing this with something from the 1,000-bottle wine list, which ranges from a \$19 bottle of Muscadet to a \$4,483 bottle of 1990 La Tâche Burgundy.

In the dining room, faux-ostrich chairs and mohair couches custom-made by Williams-Sonoma Home give the chocolate-walled, high-ceilinged space a faintly catalog-like—albeit glossily upscale—air; the room seems studiously designed to appeal to the moneyed crowd that populates the space. The tables, set with Christofle flatware and Spiegelau glassware, encourage you to order in kind.

Which is no hardship, since Sullivan's food is elegant and restrained, perhaps best described as American cuisine with a dash of French influence. Tender, buttered Maine lobster, served with potato gnocchi and braised lettuces, is simple and well-executed, and the accompanying tomato concassé balances the richness, providing a light sauce for the lettuce and gnocchi. Aside from Sullivan's skill, the kitchen's greatest resource is its private five-acre farm in the Santa Cruz Mountains, which supplies most of the vegetables for both the Pub and Spruce.

As the restaurant settles into itself, it will undoubtedly face a metamorphosis of some kind, but it obviously aims to be both a neighborhood spot and a dining destination. If it can successfully balance those two missions, Spruce will have been worth the wait. x



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