

## Great plates

My most memorable meals of 2010.

By **Katie Machol**

**H**ere they are, the 10 most memorable meals I've eaten in Tampa Bay this year (and would gladly go back and order again):

**Blu Figs Gourmet Lounge** in Carrollwood serves a **red wine braised short rib** which I enjoyed earlier this year. It was a small, fairly simple dish in theory, but executed perfectly and was further complemented by the shallot jus. *15463 N. Dale Mabry, Tampa, 813-963-3447.*

Mr. Dunderbak's **Red Reuben** contains sweet red cabbage used in place of sauerkraut, which pairs well with the tangy Thousand Island dressing and melty Swiss cheese. It's perfectly toasted and just a hint on the greasy side (a good thing). I do feel guilty often neglecting the rest of Dunderbak's menu of homemade German fare, but the Red Reuben's call is too loud. *14929 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, 813-977-4104.*

Formerly in Carrollwood, **Down Under Pizza's kangaroo-topped pizza** was a very memorable meal because it was the first time I had eaten kangaroo! The crust had a pleasantly chewy texture, its soy-lime sauce added a hint of tanginess and the strips of kangaroo meat were spicy and a tad gamey. Sadly, Down Under Pizza is now closed and they took with them my beloved 'roo pie.

SideBern's creative cocktail list holds a special place in my heart. Manager Dean Hurst creates seasonal cocktail creations and the **autumn High Road**, with anejo tequila, muddled apple, agave nectar and oak aged bitters, hit the jackpot with this tequila-loving gal. (Okay, it wasn't a meal, but a very memorable drink nonetheless.) *2208 W. Morrison Ave., Tampa, 813-258-2233.*

Not too far outside of the Tampa City limits is Rapsallions in Land O' Lakes. This Jimmy Buffett/pirate-themed restaurant is famous for **seafood chowder**. It's creamy, perfectly

seasoned and chock full of conch, shrimp and other unidentifiable veggies. Do yourself a favor and order a whole bowl (or two). *4422 LOL Blvd., Land O Lakes, 813-235-6511.*

The Don CeSar's **Maritana Grille** does seafood justice. If I had to pick just one dish from their fresh and creative offerings to add to this list, it would be the **Hamachi tartare with compressed watermelon and microgreens**. It was like buttah, melting away in my mouth

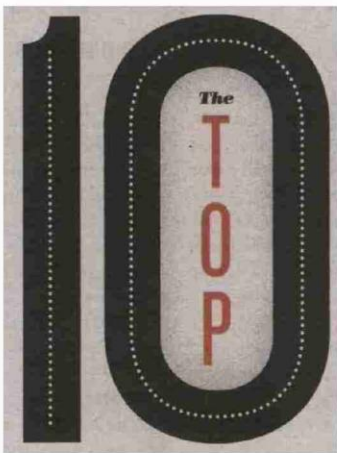
and leaving just a hint of the fish and concentrated watermelon tastes. *3400 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach, 727-360-1881.*

St. Pete Beach's Sloppy Pelican serves basic bar food and burgers, and as I learned this year while scouting spots for our Summer Guide, they've also got some **killer nachos**. The "regular" size is a heaping mound of tortilla chips with all the fixins and is easily a meal for four in itself. *677 75th Ave., St. Pete Beach, 727-367-5556.*

Further proving my refinement, at this last year's Strawberry Festival I consumed the end-all, be-all of corn dogs: **the foot-long**. There's nothing like gnawing on a warm corn dog straight from the fryer, with a slightly sweet cornbread exterior surrounding a good ol'-fashioned hot dog and just a dash of mustard. And everyone knows that corn dogs at the fair always taste the best.

**Baklava** is a favorite sweet treat of mine and, of course, Tarpon Springs' Greek bakeries know baklava. On my first visit to the historic downtown area, I picked up some of Hellas' flaky, buttery, sticky and sweet version of the traditional dessert and learned what real baklava is supposed to taste like. *785 Dodecanese Blvd, Tarpon Springs, 727-943-2400.*

I know this is cheating because the following restaurant isn't in the Tampa Bay area, but Raglan Road Irish Pub and Restaurant in Downtown Disney serves the **Smokie City**, which is reason enough to visit the place. It's smoked whitefish, potatoes and cherry tomatoes in a small dish that's topped with Irish cheddar and baked to ooey gooey smoky goodness and served with grilled crusty bread for dipping. *1640 E. Buena Vista Drive, Lake Buena Vista, 407-938-0300. ☺*



Further proving my refinement, I will admit that I have a deep love for corn dogs.

KARL SIMON