

TASTE OF THE TOWN



From left: the avocado pizza (left) with the butternut squash and sage pizza; a view of the patio at Lido Marina Village; the brown butter beet pasta (front) with the wood-fired carrots

WOOD-FIRED WONDERS

ENJOY AN ALFRESCO MEAL BY THE WATER AT SKAL PIZZA, A SWEDISH-INSPIRED EATERY THAT OFFERS A VEGETABLE-FORWARD MENU FILLED WITH FRESH FARE.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

There's something in the air at Lido Marina Village: The harborfront shopping complex is home to a number of farm-to-table eateries, from Lido Bottle Works to Malibu Farm and, in the spring, a fresh new restaurant joined the lineup.

Skal Pizza was founded by chef Helene Henderson to celebrate her Swedish roots and, as with Malibu Farm, which she also created, the menu is filled with fresh vegetables that make up the perfect dishes to enjoy in Southern California's endless sunshine. Most of the eatery's seating is outdoors, overlooking Newport Harbor, but a few counter seats and a communal table by a cozy fireplace are also available.

The main appeal of Skal Pizza is the dome-shaped, wood-fired oven. This is used to cook the pizzas and small plates, like the flavorful heirloom carrots, served with hot honey and herbed labneh sauce. Like most items on the menu, the vegetable dishes are ideal for sharing or enjoying on your own.

With a focus on produce, the salads are bound to be a hit, and Skal offers some creative options like the arugula salad with rotating seasonal fruit, the charred ranch and the mushroom with fennel. But the

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sunflower ratatouille is the most popular, containing mixed greens topped with eggplant, zucchini, beets, sweet potato and mint as well as both sunflower seeds and paste and a white maple balsamic dressing.

Skal's delicious pastas are worth trying as well, crafted using veggies mixed with flour to produce dishes like the red-hued brown butter beet capellini or the vibrant green spinach and pesto casarecce. But the pizzas are the main attraction, and you'd be remiss not to try the avocado variety. This stunning dish features a jalapeno ricotta base that is topped with thick slices of creamy avocado, small slices of spicy serrano peppers, cilantro and a sweet drizzle of agave.

Some other standouts include the butternut squash and sage, crafted with vegan Gouda cheese, a base of tomato sauce made with produce from Italy and large slices of squash, and the artichoke and white sauce. The dough is made with a blend of two

flours—a local multigrain and an Italian variety—as well as sunflower and sesame seeds, and the flavor produced is unrivaled.

Don't skip dessert—you can opt for strawberry marshmallow, matcha tapioca or coffee-flavored budinos (an Italian-style custard), but you'll likely be most impressed with the wood-fired fruit. Choose from a caramelized banana, roasted rosemary grapes or pinot noir-poached pears, all heated in the oven.

And don't worry that you'll go thirsty. Serving only beer and wine, you can try sake cocktails, from the sparkling sangria to a Swiss margarita or passion fruit mule; a number of European brews are also available. But there are great options if you're looking for nonalcoholic beverages as well, from hibiscus-rose-blood orange tea and French press coffee to deliciously sweet lemonades in flavors like raspberry-orange or lavender and blueberry.

The variety and flavor that fills the simple menu at Skal Pizza is impressive to say the least. From the fresh produce to authentic techniques used to prepare each dish, you're sure to find yourself heading back to try more. **NBM**