



Photos by ANNE STOKES
by THEA MARIE ROOD



The Red Rabbit Kitchen & Bar

*In our too-serious time, a Sacramento institution retains its **emphasis on fun***

Starting with its iconic rabbit theme—reminiscent of the 56-foot-long “Leap” sculpture at Sacramento International Airport—everything about The Red Rabbit Kitchen & Bar is committed to showcasing “local,” but with a swanky, unexpected twist.

First the swank: Designed by Lynn Mayugba, co-owner Sonny Mayugba’s wife, the interior includes walls of exposed brick, dark leather booths—lit by a glowing line of half-a-dozen lamps—and a massive U-shaped bar. Whimsical details are also fun to pick out, like the red rabbit light hiding cunningly under the front desk, which also sports a bright red vintage phone.

Then the local: sources like Del Monte Meat Co. and Del Rio Botanical out of West Sacramento, as well as Produce Express, Track 7 Brewing Company and Grateful Bread, all Sacramento-based. The Red Rabbit even uses local photographers and a local credit union.

“Farm-to-fork is fairly ubiquitous now and people are a lot more savvy—and have a certain level of expectation,” says general manager Alfonso Marquez, who’s been with the restaurant since it opened its doors in February 2012. “To know you’re going out but also supporting a local business and the local economy—people

feel good about that.”

Even more compelling is how fresh, local, seasonal ingredients impact taste. “Anyone can tell ‘this came out of a jar versus this was made from scratch,’” Marquez says. “Our juice is pressed fresh every day. I can give you two drinks side-by-side, and you can tell the difference.”

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Finally, the unexpected: the menu. As warm weather hits, try the remarkably flavorful basil cocktail, made with gin, fresh-squeezed lemon juice, small batch pineapple gum syrup, absinthe and a floating basil leaf. The citrus and basil aroma hits you even before you take a sip.

What pairs well? The empanadas, which come three to a plate, perfect for sharing (or keeping all to yourself).



Crunchy on the outside and soft inside, they are filled with a spicy shredded-beef-and-vegetable combination that reminds you of a long-simmered chili or beef stew. Next, do not hesitate: Order the house specialty, pork osso bucco, presented dramatically—bone-in—and topping creamy polenta, surrounded artfully by baby carrots. Once you cut into this lovingly braised, fork-tender meat, though, it might be your mother’s pot roast. As in all the dishes, the vegetables here are perfectly cooked, with a satisfying bite. Could it be Chef John Bay’s prior experience as the head chef for Sacramento City Unified School District (after stints at Mulvaney’s Building & Loan and Piatti’s)? No right-minded 7-year-old will eat mushy vegetables.

Lastly, grab a plate of churro donuts, lightly fried to a perfect crispness, every inch coated in cinnamon and sugar, then drizzled with chocolate. Your inner kid will get a kick out of this delightfully surprising take on dessert—and it’s OK to lick your fingers.

If you’re interested in being covered by Indulge, contact Rosemarie Messina at rosemariem@newsandreview.com.

VIBE

Retro and sophisticated, but with a definite playful edge

PERFECT FOR

...everything from meeting your colleagues after work to bringing a first date

ASK ABOUT

The back patio, with a fireplace, private bar and space for 50 guests (chicest wedding venue ever?)

CUISINE COST

Drinks: \$6-\$15

Food: \$5.50-\$29

LOCATION

*2718 J St.,
Sacramento*

CONTACT

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theredrabbit.net*