

NEWPORT BEACH
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Newport Beach Independent

[Great Maple Turns Over New Leaf for Spring](#)

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"Wow. Wow. Wow."

Those were the first three words that came out of my mouth after just one bite of the new Salmon Wellington entrée just added to the menu at Great Maple in Fashion Island.

I don't often sample dishes at the same spot twice in one month, but after trying some of Great Maple's sensational signature items two weeks ago (including a fabulous lamb burger with goat cheese), I returned to check out the restaurant's new seasonal dishes.

They've added some new salads and entrees, changed the presentation on a few items, and basically made it even more challenging for hungry diners to choose an option from the extensive menu. Everything sounds terrific, and the food looks and tastes as good as its description.

But back to the Salmon Wellington. The presentation is pretty, but it's when you cut into the flaky crust and scoop up a forkful of the delicate yet sturdy salmon dipped in hollandaise sauce that nirvana strikes.

"Chef, the flavors and textures in this dish are superb," I enthused when chef Laurent Ferre came over to say hello. ""How difficult is this to make?"

"Not too complicated," he replied. "Sautee some spinach, sear the salmon in advance, wrap it in a puff pastry—not too difficult. Sometimes the simplest things look complicated."

"It's a nicely done dish. The salmon is cooked to perfection and the entire dish is bursting with flavors. Really well done."

"Thank you. We've made other changes to the menu since you were here. We added a St. Germain Nicoise salad, a Berry & Duck salad, we changed the ravioli and are using spinach and sage butter. We also changed the Ribeye steak, for \$23 it comes with red wine sauce, a mini Caesar salad, and French fries. We also changed the presentation on the baby back ribs and the flat iron steak."

"What prompted the changes?" I asked him.

"We added seasonal menu items, such as the duck and tuna salads, but it's also because people like them. We have to take into account who is in the mall, who is shopping, and keep in mind what can people will spend. If we go higher than \$25 for lunch, that's not what shoppers want. They are looking for a good salad at good price. The sandwiches and pizza are also popular. In fact, everything on the menu is selling well."

"I'm glad to hear it. I'll be coming back soon for your Monday night All-American menu—I need another lamb burger with goat cheese, although I think the Salmon Wellington just replaced the lamb burger as my favorite dish on your menu."

For more information on Great Maple's new spring Menu items, visit <http://greatmaplefashionisland.com>.

Speaking of the All American menu, I saw that special highlighted on the iViu app that I downloaded to my Smart Phone (it's also available for iPhone users). This new app is in its beta phase and is being tested at Great Maple and at Hi Time Cellars, but I recommend downloading it now because this app has amazing potential, and will revolutionize how diners engage and interact with restaurants.



An iViu preview and the real thing.

Imagine strolling past a restaurant and suddenly seeing a happy-hour notification pop up on your smart phone. You click on the libations menu and scroll through photos of cocktails, click on an image and read the ingredients. Intrigued, you step inside the restaurant and take a seat at the bar. Upon ordering a drink, another notification arrives on your cell phone touting the daily specials in the dining room. The food photo looks so good, you finish your drink and decide to stay for dinner.

That's exactly what's happening at Great Maple, thanks to iViu. I spoke to Nicole Pichardo, marketing director for iViu, and she gave me the scoop on how the technology works, and what's in store over the coming weeks as the app, and the restaurant's needs, continue to be explored and refined.

"We feel we can communicate the traits that set the restaurant apart," explained Pichardo. "We do this through notifications."

Basically, there are three different types of notifications that an iViu user can receive: Near Me, Close By, and Favorite.

A Near Me notification comes when you are actually in the restaurant, or in the case of Hi Time, in a certain section of the store. This notification can be for a wine that's on sale, or a drink special in the bar.

A Close By notification is one a shopper near Great Maple might receive with an enticing offer designed to draw them into the restaurant. The third notification comes when a user "favorites" Great Maple or Hi Time.

The app currently includes photos of Great Maple cocktails and a list of ingredients, but plans are in the works to add photos of the entire menu as well as videos of cocktails and selected dishes being prepared.

And of course, you can share those photos (and coupons or other promotional offers) with friends via your favorite social networks.

"We'll be adding food and wine pairings, and implementing other cross-promotions between Great Maple and Hi Time," said Pichardo. "It makes you feel like an insider, more like a community."

Indeed—I'm waiting for the day when I'm sitting in Great Maple and someone at the next table says "I wonder what this dish looks like." I'll tap my iViu app, lean over, and with a knowing voice state, "Just like this!"