

# Surf and Small Plates

Bar Acuda, in Hanalei, brings city chic to Kaua'i

By Jocelyn Fujii

Photograph by Gelston Dwight

## Bar Acuda

Hanalei Town Center  
5-5161 Kūhiō Highway  
Hanalei, Kaua'i  
(808) 826-7081

**Dinner for two, food only:** \$65–\$70

**Service:** Smooth and professional

**Setting:** Chic and sleek, with indoor/outdoor seating

**Best dishes:** Medjool date salad; *bacalao*

Through the 1990s, chef Jim Moffat had two popular restaurants in San Francisco, the Slow Club and 42 Degrees. They had everything most restaurateurs long for—success, awards, and a loyal clientele. But in Moffat's eyes, they were missing one thing: good surf just around the corner.

So about three years ago, Moffat decided to move to Hanalei, on Kaua'i's North Shore. About a year ago, he opened Bar Acuda in the Hanalei Town Center. Diners have been buzzing about the Mediterranean-style tapas restaurant ever since.

Though Moffat takes full advantage of his new location—Bar Acuda serves dinner only, so he can surf every morning—the restaurant's decor, designed by his fiancée, Sonja Postær, incorporates a bit of San Francisco. It's chic verging on chichi. The high bamboo ceilings, solid teak bar, surprisingly comfortable metal chairs, and gleaming floors of *ipe* (a Brazilian wood) create an urbane ambience.

According to Moffat, the room was designed as much for socializing as for dining. "We wanted to create something



The salad of Medjool dates, shaved Parmesan, celery, and reduced balsamic vinegar is one of the best small plates at Bar Acuda, a tapas restaurant in Hanalei.

community-oriented," he says. "We wanted people to use food as a reason to get together and socialize."

The menu, which changes daily, was also designed to encourage socializing. Consisting of small entrées and tapas, it invites diners to share dishes, the best of which highlight the region's fish and seasonal produce. Kaua'i's North Shore is peppered with organic farms and bordered by fish-rich waters, and the blending of superior ingredients and culinary creativity is powerful.

The *bacalao* I sampled during a recent visit showcased fresh Kaua'i fish. The Portuguese dish of salt cod baked with cream, garlic, and potatoes was served piping hot in a small crock. It wasn't too salty and was delectable on crostini.

Another dish, baked ricotta with roasted grapes, was too bland for my taste, but the grilled mahimahi was

simple, fresh, and elegant. Even better was the salad of Medjool dates with shaved Parmesan, reduced balsamic vinegar, and celery. The moist sweetness of the dates, the sharpness of the cheese, the crunch and slight bitterness of the celery, and the depth of the vinegar created a brilliant explosion of flavors and textures.

The wines are a story all their own, with some 50 estate-bottled vintages. Labels that restaurateurs vie for, such as Turley, appear on the wine list alongside the iconoclastic Bonny Doon and some small producers.

Entrées cost \$24–\$26 and tapas are \$5–\$11, which makes dining at Bar Acuda a bit of a splurge. And its North Shore location is out of the way for many. But those willing to brave the expense and the drive will find much more than good surf. ■