

SECTION FD

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THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
FOOD.AZCENTRAL.COM



OUR CRITICS
PICK THE
BEST DISHES,
DINING AND
DRINKS IN **2012**

MICHAEL MCNAMARA/THE REPUBLIC

RESTAURANT

KAI
Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa
5594 W. Wild Horse Pass Blvd., Gila River
Reservation
602-225-0100
wildhorsepassresort.com

There are great luxury meals to be had all over the world. But there is simply no meal like Kai's anyplace else on Earth — not in New York, not in Paris, not in Tokyo.

That's because of Kai's unique location, and the unique cuisine it inspires. Set on the Gila River Reservation, the restaurant showcases tribal and regional ingredients, masterfully composed by chef Michael O'Dowd.

Prepare for a memorable evening of non-stop culinary thrills. Get dinner under way with the brilliant combination of Burgundy snails with wild mushrooms, caramel goat cheese and truffled crema, or the breath-

taking suckling-pig torta with membrillo and manchego cheese on fluffy saguaro-seed popovers.

The signature main dish is the gorgeous buffalo tenderloin, set in a pool of smoked-corn puree with bits of merguez sausage, and topped with saguaro-blossom syrup. But it's hard to pass up the superb venison, rubbed with coffee and chile and teamed with sage-infused gnocchi, or the potpourri of butter-basted lobster, Guaymas shrimp and diver scallops ornamented with ham hocks and crisped shallots.

Pampering service is also part of the equation. Silverware is chilled or warmed, depending on what you are eating. Alerted that you've left the restaurant, the valet will have your car waiting for you when you walk out the door.

Kai is a world-class dining experience. How nice that it's right here in our little corner of the world.

— Howard Seftel



Suckling-pig torta with membrillo and manchego cheese at Kai. MICHAEL MCNAMARA/THE REPUBLIC

Every day, every week, you want to know about things to do and the people who shape our Valley.

The reporters and critics of *The Arizona Republic* and *azcentral*, who are authorities on the topics they cover, are here to help. Whether it's dining or theater, music or hiking, we know what's new and what's trending.

The standout people, places and things that our experts have discovered over the past year are highlighted in **azcentral's Best 2012**.

Enjoy exploring all our favorites, and please let us know about the gems you've uncovered.

In today's Food & Drink — Our restaurant critic picks the best new restaurant, best chef transition and an array of best regional dishes.

Thursday in Things to Do — From karaoke to pet events to specialty bars, our experts tell you the best places for fun.

In Friday's community Republics: Local picks for best Mexican restaurant and more.

At best.azcentral.com — Find the full list of critics' picks. And, starting Sunday, April 1, that's where Reader's Choice ballots will be posted.

NEW RESTAURANT

Citizen Public House
7111 E. Fifth Ave., Scottsdale
480-398-4208
citizenpublichouse.com

Is the food at Citizen Public House accessibly edgy? Or is it edgily accessible? It really doesn't matter: Chef Bernie Kantak has found the right post-recession balance at this Scottsdale spot.

After 12 years heading the kitchen at Cowboy Ciao, Kantak knows what he's doing. CPH is firing on all cylinders. Kantak has lots of fun with appetizers, especially the rapturously scrumptious pork-belly "pastrami" with spaetzle and shredded brussels sprouts. Your interest won't flag when you follow up with main dishes such as coffee-rubbed short ribs in cherry barbecue sauce, smoked duck breast and scallops with grits and lardons.

A top-notch cocktail program is another plus. That's why dinner at new Citizen Public House never gets old.

— Howard Seftel