

Room With a View

Maui oceanfront setting at Māla Wailea agrees with Mark Ellman's Mediterranean cuisin

By Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi

Photograph by Ron Dahlquist

Māla Wailea

3700 Wailea Alanui Drive
Wailea, Maui; (808) 875-9394

Dinner for two, food only:
\$50–\$100

Service: Attentive, but paced too quickly at times

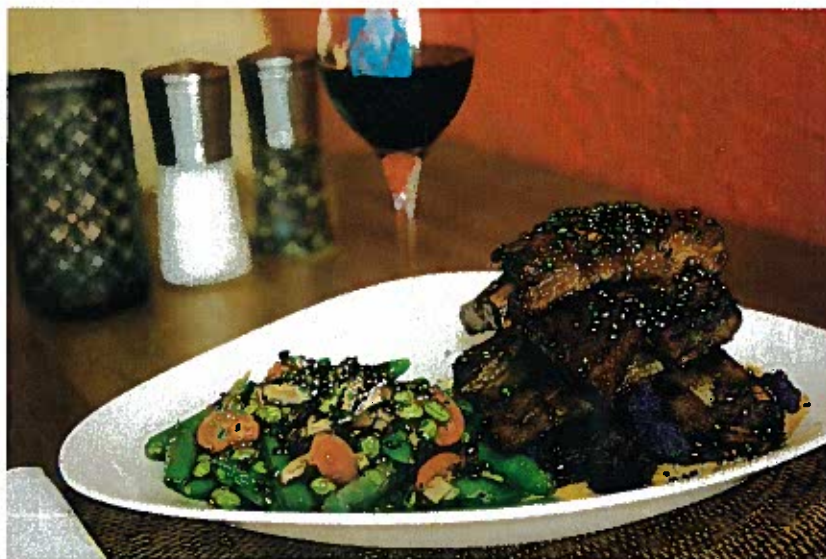
Setting: Casual; crowded lanai seating opens to a spectacular ocean view

Best dishes: Whole wok-fried fish; Caramel Miranda

Mark Ellman has a golden touch. With 11 other chefs in the early 1990s, he helped to launch the Hawai'i Regional Cuisine movement. He subsequently founded the award-winning Penne Pasta Café and Māla Ocean Tavern on Maui and nine Maui Tacos on Maui, O'ahu, and Hawai'i Island.

Ellman's latest venture, Māla Wailea, is yet another winner. It's off the lobby of the recently renovated AAA Four Diamond Wailea Beach Marriott Resort & Spa, and hand-tinted photos of Hawai'i—including some of surfers and hula dancers from the Bishop Museum's archives—adorn its interior.

Dinner is a celebration of exotic flavors. Though tortilla chips, salsa, and edamame puree are complimentary, the appetizers should not be overlooked. For example, grilled pita bread and flaxseed *lavosh* spring to life when dipped in hummus, *raita*, baba ghanoush, or a blend of olive oil and feta (imported from Greece). Seasonings such as cayenne pepper, cilantro, cumin, lemon juice, and garlic—which can be too assertive in less experienced hands—blend together in savory harmony. One order satisfies two.



Short ribs braised in sake with Yukon Gold potatoes and organic vegetables is sometimes a special at Maui's Māla Wailea.

There are just six entrées on the regular menu, but what Ellman does, he usually does well. His signature whole wok-fried fish is a moist, tender, two-pound 'ōpakapaka cloaked in a ginger-garlic black bean sauce that can be prepared mild or spicy. When in doubt, make it mild—with the shiitake mushroom-ginger sauce for the Avalon seared sashimi, too, which is available at three heat levels. Ordered medium, it overwhelmed the herb-crust 'ahi.

There are also six nightly specials. Sometimes, that list includes a meaty, melt-in-your-mouth short rib braised in sake and trimmed of all fat. First-class comfort food, it's served with a mound of creamy Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and organic veggies.

Those who prefer a quick bite should focus on the five Tavern items, which include a succulent half-pound Kobe beef

cheeseburger with Maytag blue cheese (or cheddar) and applewood smoked bacon. It's pricey for a burger, but good enough to quash future Big Mac cravings.

For dessert, it's worth saving room for the Caramel Miranda. Maui Gold pineapple, baby coconut, and fresh fruit layered over a dark chocolate and caramel sauce and served with a scoop of vanilla macadamia-nut brittle ice cream, sweet perfection.

Not everything can be that perfect. Pace is important, and the friendly, attentive staff should allow more time between courses. Also, the lanai offers panoramic views of Kaho'ola Molokini, West Maui, and Lāna'i, some may think the tables there set too close together.

All in all, however, Māla Wailea is a welcome addition to Maui's vibrant dining scene. ■