



ASCEND PRIME STEAK + SUSHI

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD



After interviewing Chef Brandon Muehl—culinary director and creative force behind Ascend Prime Steak & Sushi for nearly six years—my husband Steve and I stayed for dinner. I had heard so much about the high-volume precision and artful blending of steakhouse staples with sushi elegance, all perched on the 31st floor with sweeping views of Mount Rainier and Puget Sound. Now, I had the pleasure of tasting that vision come to life.

We started with cocktails—each one a piece of mixology theater. I sipped the 1921 cocktail, a jewel-toned elixir of Empress gin, blood orange, honey rose syrup, lemon, and cardamom. It was floral and citrusy, with a whisper of spice at the finish. Steve opted for the Washington, a smooth, brooding blend of Woodinville port

cask whiskey, jammy vermouth, bourbon cherry syrup, and antique bitters.

The amuse-bouche arrived next: a foie gras bavarois, crowned with a nasturtium leaf and airy foam. Silky, rich, and delicately floral, it set the tone for the layers of surprise still to come.

Our first course, the Spicy Tuna & Prosciutto Roll, was a brilliant interplay of textures and flavors. The spicy mix packed heat from shichimi togarashi—Japan’s version of a seven-spice blend—balanced by creamy avocado and tomato relish. Delicate sheets of prosciutto, bottarga (cured fish roe), and bubu are topped the roll, and tiny toasted rice crackers added a satisfying crunch. Each bite produced a perfect harmony of spicy, savory, and unexpectedly cohesive.

For the second course, we cleansed our palates

with the Baby Beet Salad, a visually stunning arrangement of intense, purple-toned beets, shiso sorbet (a refreshing Japanese mint), horseradish espuma, pickled shallots, and pistachio in various forms—crumble and praline. Compressed green apple strips and a tuile added crunch and brightness. It was playful yet refined.

Next came what our server called their “most composed dish”—Seared Sonoma Foie Gras. It was an architectural marvel: tiny toasted walnut waffles layered with seared foie, caramelized Asian pear, and dollops of yuzu meringue. Beneath it all, black sesame paint and a drizzle of huckleberry red wine gastrique, along with maple bourbon foie gras jus, added depth and tang. Paired with a glass of D’Oliveira Boal 2001 Madeira, the sweet-savory richness



danced with every sip. The Madeira, aged for over two decades and bottled just last year, had a delicious complexity that lingered long after the foie was gone.

As the lights dimmed and the city glittered below us, our entrées arrived accompanied by a generous pour of Marsannay “La Charme Aux Prêtres” Domaine Bruno Clair 2022—a refined Burgundy with elegant spice and a silky texture from old vines. The wine was young, but structured, with just enough oak to complement the depth of our dishes.

The Alder + Fruit Wood Grilled King Salmon was a perfectly cooked fillet, topped with black garlic and celery root purées, finished with mint pesto, pickled red onion, and a shichimi togarashi-charred lemon. It was earthy, herba- ceous, and kissed with smoke.

The Filet Mignon, wet-aged for 28 days, was

spectacular, but we also shared an eight-ounce New York A5 Wagyu, which truly melted like butter on the tongue.

For sides, we could not resist the Mashed Yukon and Purple Sweet Potato Duo—a subtly sweet and savory blend that was like eating a creamy cloud. The Crab Mac and Cheese with Edamame added richness and a touch of green brightness to balance.

Then came dessert—two, actually. First, the Magic Mushroom: a whimsical tribute to the Pacific Northwest and a nod to Super Mario Bros. The cap was a cherry Rainier mousse, and the stem was a white chocolate bourbon. Around it, espresso and matcha crumbles, dark chocolate base, mocha pot de crème, and candied honey meringue “mushrooms” brought the fantasy to life.

The Skyfall was equally dazzling. Goat cheese

panna cotta disks, white chocolate, shiso pastry cream, and macerated berries, paired with miso chocolate sauce, created a multilayered flavor profile—tangy, earthy, sweet, and umami all at once.

By the end of the evening, we felt utterly content. Chef Muehl’s ability to execute a high-volume, fine-dining menu with such exacting detail is nothing short of astonishing. The staff was knowledgeable and gracious, the wine pairings intentional, and the flavors imaginative yet grounded.

Dining at Ascend Prime is not just about the food or the view; it is about the experience, where precision meets creativity, and every plate reflects passion and discipline. ❖