

Diverse cuisines find a common bond at LYNQ

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Design is an element of the restaurant experience that rarely garners a lot of attention, at least in Southwest Florida. Tropical and coastal clichés abound here, with their pastel hues and prefabricated marine knick-knacks. One place closes and some other Bobby Flay wannabe comes in with a sure-fire food gimmick but fails to invest time, vision or money into creating a noteworthy setting.

Not so Jean-Claude Roge. This longtime local restaurateur, along with Blu Sushi founder Chris Whitaker, has completely and dramatically renovated the space formerly occupied by Yabo in south Fort Myers and reopened it as LYNQ. Just a year ago, they completed a similarly radical rehab on The Oyster Shell in Fort Myers, turning that quaint old seafood diner into the singularly chic restaurant Blanc.

Mr. Roge made his reputation here with the late, lamented Village Café on Captiva Island and La Brasserie in Fort Myers, and he brings an artist's eye to conceptualizing and fabricating interior spaces. His restaurants truly are art installations, exploring the interplay of metal, wood and stone and conjuring new approaches to lighting. At LYNQ, the dining room feels more open than it used to as Yabo. Whitewashed brick and overlaid panels of light-toned wood and shimmering metals amplify the glow generated by Mr. Roge's custom lighting fixtures. All of those hard surfaces and the soaring ceiling also tend to amplify the decibel level of music and happy-hour conversation, which is a drawback.

Flipping through LYNQ's clipboard menu, it's hard to get a fix on the venture's culinary aspirations. There's sushi, tacos, pasta, steaks and ramen. There are flavors of Italy, Japan, Thailand, Mexico and the American South. Can one restaurant do all of these things well?

For the most part, and admittedly based on just one visit, LYNQ appears to be up to the globe-trotting task. Most dishes we tried were as well conceived and executed as the décor.

The cocktail menu is equally complex, with a cornucopia of elixirs infused with fruits, nuts and spices. The Bootleg Mule (\$10) is a heady mix of Siesta Key Spiced rum, dark rum and ginger beer served in the traditional copper mug. The Bug-Eyed Betty (\$11) elevates the typical Cosmo formula with the addition of blood-orange



Crispy grouper and copious toppings are tucked into flour tortillas.



The short rib ramen had a silky beef broth with a richly developed flavor.

juice. Local brews like Scotty's Bierworks' hefeweizen (\$5) from Cape Coral are on tap, too.

The bar was apparently backed up, and our drinks came out one at a time. But service overall was responsive and friendly. Our server offered a sample of sangria, sought answers in the kitchen to some of our questions, and never made us feel rushed.

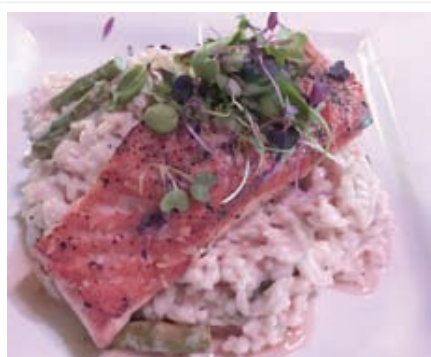
If you were a fan of Yabo's gnocchi, you can still get them as a starter. We opted instead for the pork belly BLT (\$9) because, well, it's pork belly and fried green tomatoes (with a nominal pinch of frisee representing the greens). The tender pork had a delicious char and a perfect proportion of

fat to meat so it didn't come across as a mouthful of flab. The saltiness was balanced by the acidic tomatoes, which had a creamy texture encased in crunchy panko crumbs. Tying it all together was roasted garlic aioli, sparingly drizzled across the plate.

If you don't mind messy eating, the tacos are worth trying. We chose fried grouper (\$15), but there are four other filling choices. The crispy fish was topped with mango slaw, which added a nice sweetness, as well as pico de gallo and Thai chili aioli. It all made for one overstuffed little flour tortilla, and sloppy spillage ensued. A little more restraint with the fillings might make this easier to eat and allow the fish to dominate.



The massive Whit's fried chicken sandwich spills out of its brioche bun.



Salmon is served on a bed of asparagus and fontina risotto.

In contrast, the fish was foremost with the "sweet and spicy" salmon (\$23) entrée, which was served on a bed of cheesy risotto that was undercooked and crunchy. The fillet, on the other hand was flawlessly seared, yielding a well-developed crust and juicy interior. The salmon was dusted with Chinese five-spice, according to the menu, but it wasn't very spicy at all. A honey-ginger glaze provided the requisite sweet note. Not that it needed further embellishment, but the butternut squash beurre blanc mentioned on the menu was missing.

Sometimes less is more. Further proof: Whit's fried chicken sandwich (\$13), simply a moist chicken breast, lightly seasoned with salt and pepper, battered and fried to crisp perfection. A splash of ranch dressing and it's good to go. Every bite of the massive breast spilling out of its

brioche bun was moist and tender. French fries on the side were good; they were tossed with chopped pancetta, which mostly fell off onto the plate.

Far less common than chicken sandwiches, ramen is finally getting a foothold in Southwest Florida after years of popularity elsewhere. LYNQ Chef Caleb Kimble reportedly traveled in Asia during his culinary training, and it's clear he's invested time perfecting the slow-cooked broths that, with the signature wavy noodles, form the basis of the Japanese dish. His short rib ramen with beef broth (\$14) had a rich depth of flavor and almost gravy-like thickness that clung to the noodles like a glaze. Julienned carrots, scallions and cabbage

complemented the luscious beef, and a soft-boiled egg garnished the bowl. We'll be back for more.

For dessert, we shared a loosely constructed brioche bread pudding (\$7), basically a mound of warm, eggy bread cubes laced with blueberries and white chocolate and a boozy, sweet sauce. We jokingly suggested it needed more sauce, and the waiter promptly returned with a creamer full.

Sometimes, more is more.

 in the know 

LYNQ

16230 Summerlin Road, Fort Myers;
204-9345

Ratings:

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

>> **Hours:** 4-11:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday;
closed Sunday.

>> **Reservations:** Accepted

>> **Credit cards:** Accepted

>> **Price range:** Appetizers, \$5-\$13;
sandwiches and entrees, \$12-\$27

>> **Beverages:** Full bar

>> **Specialties of the house:** Seafood, Asian
fusion

>> **Volume:** High

>> **Parking:** Plaza lot

>> **Website:** lynq.life

★★★★★ **Superb**

★★★★ **Noteworthy**

★★★ **Good**

★★ **Fair**

★ **Poor**