

# Appealing Patios

As the Northwest exchanges rain for sunshine, a trio of Portland restaurants are pairing patio dining with summertime fare. Cool off with beverage offerings of carefully crafted cocktails and light summer wines, while taking in the splendor of nearby mountains, downtown views, and garden settings.

## Nel Centro

1408 SW 6th Avenue, Portland, OR  
503-484-1099, [nelcentro.typepad.com](http://nelcentro.typepad.com)



It was the pissaladière that got to me: the flavors of earthy Niçoise olives, sweet caramelized onions, and salty anchovies achingly evoked trips to the south of France that were poignantly too far in the past. But if I couldn't actually go there, at least it seemed I could eat there ... or as close as is possible in Portland.

In his new venture Nel Centro (pronounced "chentro" and meaning "in the center"), Portland restaurateur David Machado (Lauro, Vindalho) returns to his downtown hotel roots with an urbane interpretation of what he and Chef de Cuisine R. Paul Hyman are calling Riviera cuisine. It's Northwest ingredients meets Mediterranean sensibility with dishes that reflect the aromatic herbs and seasonal inspiration of the coastal country from Nice to Genoa.

Start your Riviera tour with salt cod croquettes and red pepper rouille (or the aforementioned pissaladière) to set your palate for the flavors to come.

Freshen your mouth with the vibrant fava bean and shaved fennel salad, and then dive into the entrées. The roasted halibut with baby artichokes, preserved lemon, and tapenade exude the perfumes of Provence, while the pansotti with walnut sauce is like an aria to Genoese cooking. Trenette with basil pesto is luxurious for such an uncomplicated dish; likewise, the ravioli with butter and Parmesan is superb in its simplicity.

Nel Centro's dishes display an admirable confidence—and competence—that is reflective of a clear concept, well executed by the kitchen. The ambiance is similarly self-assured: warm-toned, modern-styled banquettes and tables lend a sense of sophistication, while the wraparound, streetside views of downtown make for an energetic feel. The large square bar is inviting and open, while courtyard seating is sure to be a constant allure for downtown summertime diners.

Located at the new Hotel Modera, Nel Centro serves breakfast and lunch during the week, weekend brunch, and dinner every day.

—Cole Danehower ▶



Grilled Delmonico steak with porcini butter, asparagus, and potato gratin at Nel Centro.