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Ola offers taste of world with a Hawaiian beat

By [Helen Wu](#)
Advertiser Restaurant Critic

Almost a year to the day after Fred DeAngelo left his partnership and executive-chef position at fast-paced Tiki's Grill and Bar, he resurfaced on the North Shore with what may be the best-situated restaurant on the island. Opened Dec. 1, Ola, at Turtle Bay Resort, is a short stroll from gentle waves rolling onto the white sand at Kuilima Cove. Spotting Ola from the beach is like finding a flawless seashell on the sand.

The open-air restaurant resembles a ground-level tree house sprouting from the sand. It is fashioned from posts and rafters of sturdy ironwood trunks harvested from the Turtle Bay property, owned by Oaktree Capital Management LLC of Los Angeles. Daniel Sandomire, an Oaktree Capital architect, worked with local architectural design firm Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo.

Their creative result is a breezy dream of a space that complements Ola's easygoing, contemporary Island cuisine.

Smoke-tinted Plexiglass roof panels allow natural light to shine through. Sliding glass doors offer on-demand protection from the elements. Wide, unhampered views look out onto beach rompers, the ocean and the occasional breaching whale, inducing relaxation even if you're not on vacation.

DeAngelo, also known for his successful work at downtown's business-crowd-pleasing Palomino, returns to his roots and a family business with Ola. Leasing the site from Oaktree, the chef owns and operates the restaurant with his wife, Cheryl, her sister Brandy, and Brandy's husband, Troy Antonelis. The Antonelises focus on Olino Events, the catering arm of their small company, while Fred and Cheryl concentrate on Ola.

The DeAngelos, who married last May in Florence, Italy (the event is featured on the television show "Real Weddings from the Knot"), struggled to name their new enterprise.

"It needed to be something meaningful. It needed to have a heartbeat," DeAngelo said. His Italian grandmother is named Viola. The couple stumbled across "ola," which means "life, living, healthy or alive" in Hawaiian. DeAngelo and two of the other partners are part-Hawaiian, and they felt the word embodied their concept and captured the essence of their special locale.

With the assistance of sous chef Patrick Dart, DeAngelo's menu jaunts into New American cuisine territory, but comes home with playful, fresh Island touches in dishes such as 'ahi and lobster poke served in a wonton spoon (\$11.95) and kalua pork and goat cheese "nacho" (\$7.95).

DeAngelo has established relationships with local farmers and purveyors, especially the ones on the North Shore. The flavorful burgers (\$8.95) served at lunch are made from all-natural North Shore Cattle Co beef. Sunny-tasting tomatoes dotting salads and pastas arrive from Graf and Terry Shintaku at Green Growers Farm in Hau'ula. And Kahuku Brand-Matsuda Fukuyama Farms provide the succulent eggplants that go into a toss of



Dave Swain and Andrea Tomich enjoy dinner with a view at Ola at the Turtle Bay Resort. The couple said they used to come for the dinner lu'aus that were held on the beach near Ola's.

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Chef-owner Fred DeAngelo gives diners a sample of New American cuisine, but comes home with fresh Island touches and ingredients.

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OLA

RATING: FOUR (VERY GOOD)

Turtle Bay Resort

57-091 Kamehameha

grilled peppers, Waialua asparagus, fresh mozzarella and pine nuts that land over crunchy, grilled foccacia bread in a bruschetta salad (\$10.95).

DeAngelo said Ola will try to support the local community as much as possible while keeping to its "local first" motto, which means a seasonal menu change in spring is to be expected.

I hope the kitchen keeps the clever Hamakua mushroom "risotto" (\$16.95) made with chewy orzo instead of the usual arborio rice. The vegan dish uses porcini mushroom and vegetable stock to infuse deep, rich flavor into the simple pasta. Roasted tomatoes and sauteed Hamakua button and shiitake mushrooms add meaty texture. Spinach chiffonade and a bit of garlic make it that much more delightful. A final garnish of enoki mushrooms and truffle oil boost it into the realm of the sublime.

The chef's signature slow-poached togarashi salmon (\$26.95), which sold out during one of my visits, is one of those big, bold flavor plates that appeals to barbecue-sauce lovers. The sweet, crackly caramelized cane-sugar crust over the tender, flaky kiawe-smoked salmon was a little intense for me. However, I relished a succotash mix of cubed Okinawan sweet potato, edamame, bell peppers and Kahuku corn that sat underneath.

While certain dishes require fine-tuning, they certainly didn't lack flavor. Well-seasoned grilled chicken (\$17.95) would have been even better with crispier skin. It also contained a few tiny bones despite being described as boneless on the menu. Grilled lamb T-bone (\$28.95) hunks were difficult to eat — more bone and fat than meat — although they were tender and nicely washed with a hoisin marinade that was just right.

Tahitian vanilla creme brulée (\$6.95) surprised with half of a caramelized apple banana, giving the common dessert a tasty accompaniment. Strawberry and papaya tart (\$6.95), made by James Davidson of Jimmy's Lakeside Bakery in Wahiawa, didn't need any ice cream to put it over the top. (Davidson also provides the Chocolate Decadence cake and foccacia).

Restaurant managers Marcus Beattie and Paul Bishay, along with the rest of Ola's staff, make a warm effort to welcome locals and tourists. DeAngelo admitted, "We're only as good as our last meal."

Reach Helen Wu at hwu@honoluluadvertiser.com. Ratings reflect the reviewer's reaction to food, service and ambience in relation to price. Menu listings and prices are subject to change. Reviewer makes every effort to remain anonymous. The Advertiser pays for meals.

[Back](#)

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Highway, Kahuku

293-0801

www.turtlebayresort.com

Hours: Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.; Friday, Saturday 11 a.m.-10 p.m.

Details: Full bar. Free validated parking. Dinner reservations highly recommended. Casual resort attire, including shoes and shirts. AmEx, Disc, JCB, MC, V. Keiki menu.

Overview: In this open-air North Shore beach haven, chef-owner Fred DeAngelo takes influences from around the world and hits New American cuisine with a Hawaiian beat.

Price: Lunch - \$7.95-\$10.95 appetizers; \$8.95-\$15.95 entrees. Dinner - \$7.95 to \$12.95 appetizers; \$16.95-\$33.95 entrees.

Recommended: Lunch - 'Ahi poke; bruschetta salad; Kahuku corn on the cob; grilled fish sandwich; burger. Dinner - crab cakes; Kalua pork and goat cheese "nacho"; togarashi salmon; mushroom risotto; kiawe-smoked beef tenderloin; creme brulée; strawberry and papaya tart.

ON TV

Tune in to The Oxygen Network's "Real Weddings from the Knot" tomorrow at 3 p.m. and Sunday at 10

a.m. to see chef Fred
DeAngelo and his wife,
Cheryl, get hitched in
Florence, Italy.
