

LA REVIEW

PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

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# Crudo e Nudo

SEAFOOD SANTA MONICA

PERFECT FOR: DATE NIGHT DINING SOLO LUNCH

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KAT HONG JANUARY 13, 2022

You're going to spend a lot of money at Crudo e Nudo. That's just a fact. But unlike the time you bought a sectional couch from Craigslist, had it delivered all the way to your apartment, and then found out its springs were broken, the dollars spent at this sustainable Italian-seafood restaurant in Santa Monica will be totally worth it.

Here, that higher price point ensures that the striped bass on your plate comes from clean oceanic farms. A few extra dollars buys you rich, aromatic olive oils produced in Spain, naturally fermented wines with zero commercial yeasts, and big, juicy slices of melon that taste as sweet as candy. People with Twitter accounts love to say that there's, "No such thing as ethical consumption under capitalism," but at Crudo e Nudo, the question becomes, "Well, why not try?"



PHOTO CREDIT: ASHLEY RANDALL

Run by partners Leena Culhane and Brian Bornemann (a chef who previously worked at Michael's), Crudo e Nudo takes what has always been LA's specialty—locally sourced produce, ingredients that change with the seasons, yada yada—and ramps it up to a 10. Instead of taking random trips to the farmers market, the team here works with vendors, farms, and friends, all while focusing on building long-lasting business relationships. Ask a server on any given night and they'll happily explain how the lingcod you're about to eat was caught by a fisherman in Ventura, or where the white pomegranate seeds are from (JJ's Lone Daughter's Ranch). Oh, and those delicate, almost translucent green shavings? They're celtuce, a Chinese root vegetable grown by Coleman Farms, one of the only purveyors of it in the state.

Presented by anyone else, this information might sound like a book report, or a conversation with your most pretentious friend who has a borderline unwell need to know exactly where their free-range chicken comes from. But here, all those details serve as peeks behind the curtain, reminders that these people really care and know what they're doing.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Located in a bright, beautiful space on Main St., Crudo e Nudo is one of those eccentric post-pandemic pop-ups-turned-permanent-homes that seems to be doing a million different things all at once. There's a charming wooden deck out front complete with billowing white beach umbrellas, a full-blown seafood market that's only available to-go, and two separate dining menus: one à la carte and a three-course dinner offered at night. We prefer to order à la carte and invite a few friends, splitting bottles of wine while tossing back oysters on the half-shell. It's fun, casual, and entirely cool—the kind of experience we usually just hope to manifest, rather than actually live.

You'll of course want the namesake crudos—from rockfish dotted with dried Turkish chilis to kanpachi slick from a pool of olive oil and calamansi vinegar, each plate is unique, fresh as hell, and pretty enough to double as an editorial spread for Anthropologie. The oysters are non-negotiable, served with a floral pink peppercorn limoncello mignonette and tiny purple wildflowers we secretly wish we could press and make into a bookmark. Oh, and the clams.

One of our favorite dishes here, they take the plump, succulent mollusks and steam them in white wine and fruity olive oil. The clams pop open like a bag of Orville Redenbacher's and arrive at the table in a giant bowl. Make sure to order a side of Bub & Grandma's bread on the drive to soak it all up.

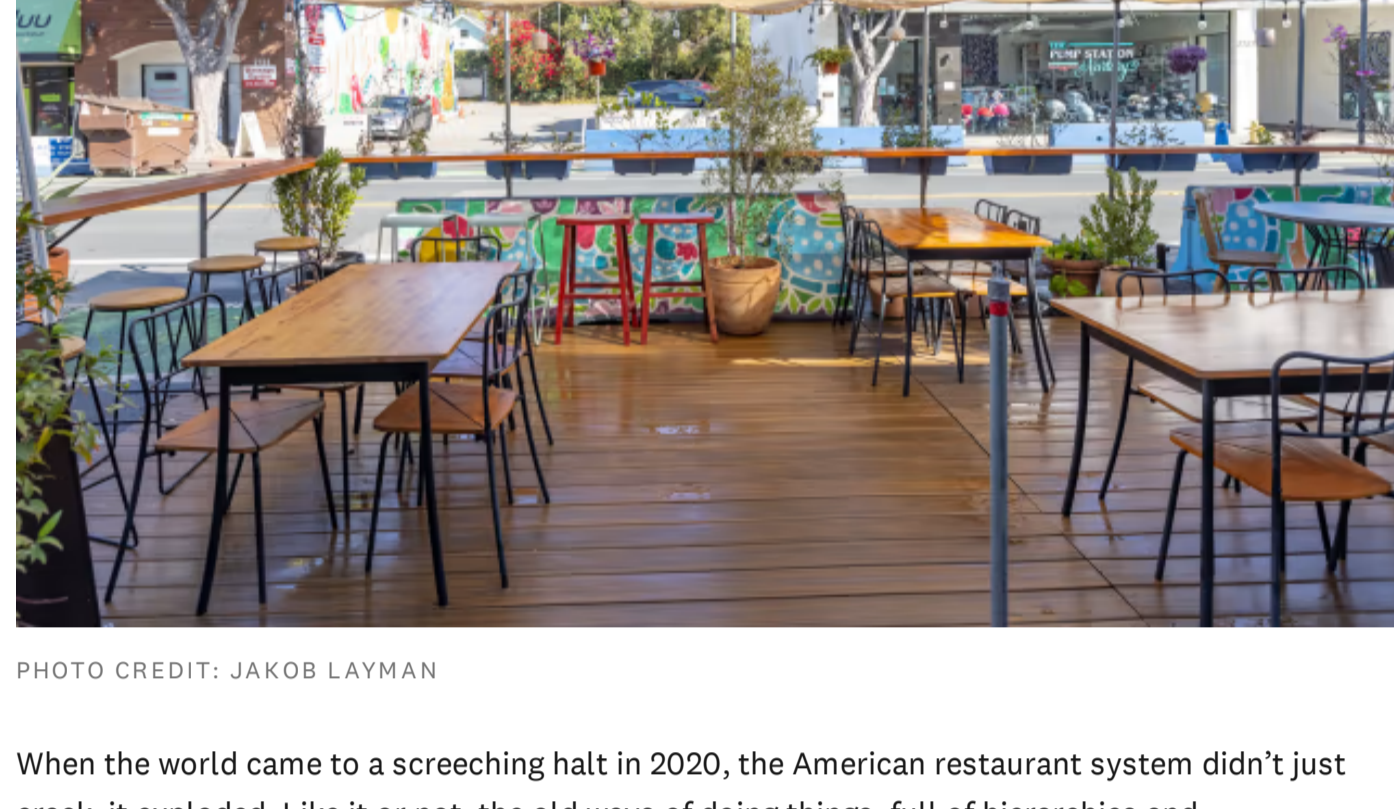


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

When the world came to a screeching halt in 2020, the American restaurant system didn't just crack, it exploded. Like it or not, the old ways of doing things, full of hierarchies and unsustainable business practices, are gone (or are at least going). But as Crudo e Nudo assures us, it's for the best. There's a whole other world out there; one that tastes better, feels good to support, and that can bring together all the best local producers in a neighborhood. You're just going to have to pay a little bit more for it.

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## Food Rundown

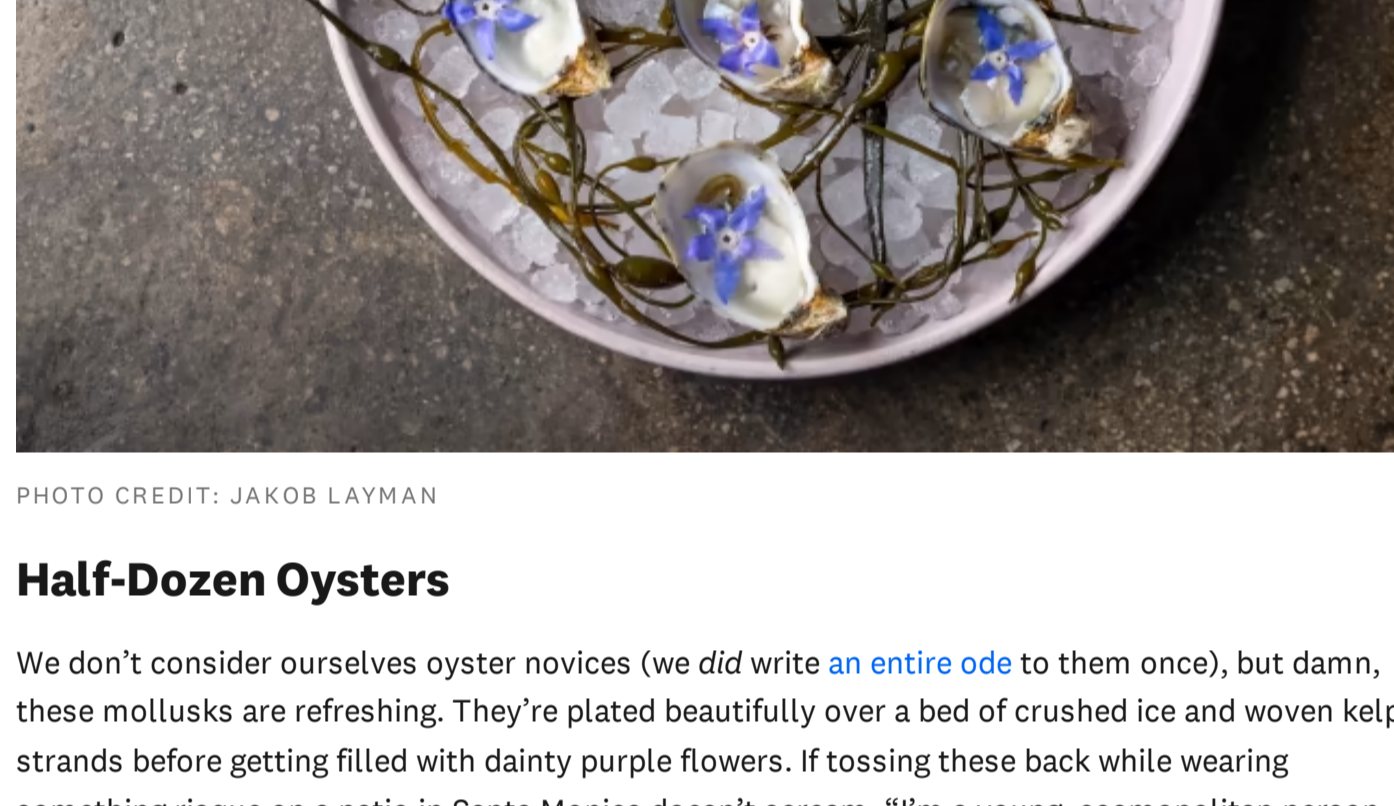


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

### Half-Dozen Oysters

We don't consider ourselves oyster novices (we did write an [entire ode](#) to them once), but damn, these mollusks are refreshing. They're plated beautifully over a bed of crushed ice and woven kelp strands before getting filled with dainty purple flowers. If tossing these back while wearing something risqué on a patio in Santa Monica doesn't scream, "I'm a young, cosmopolitan person living in a major city," we don't know what does.

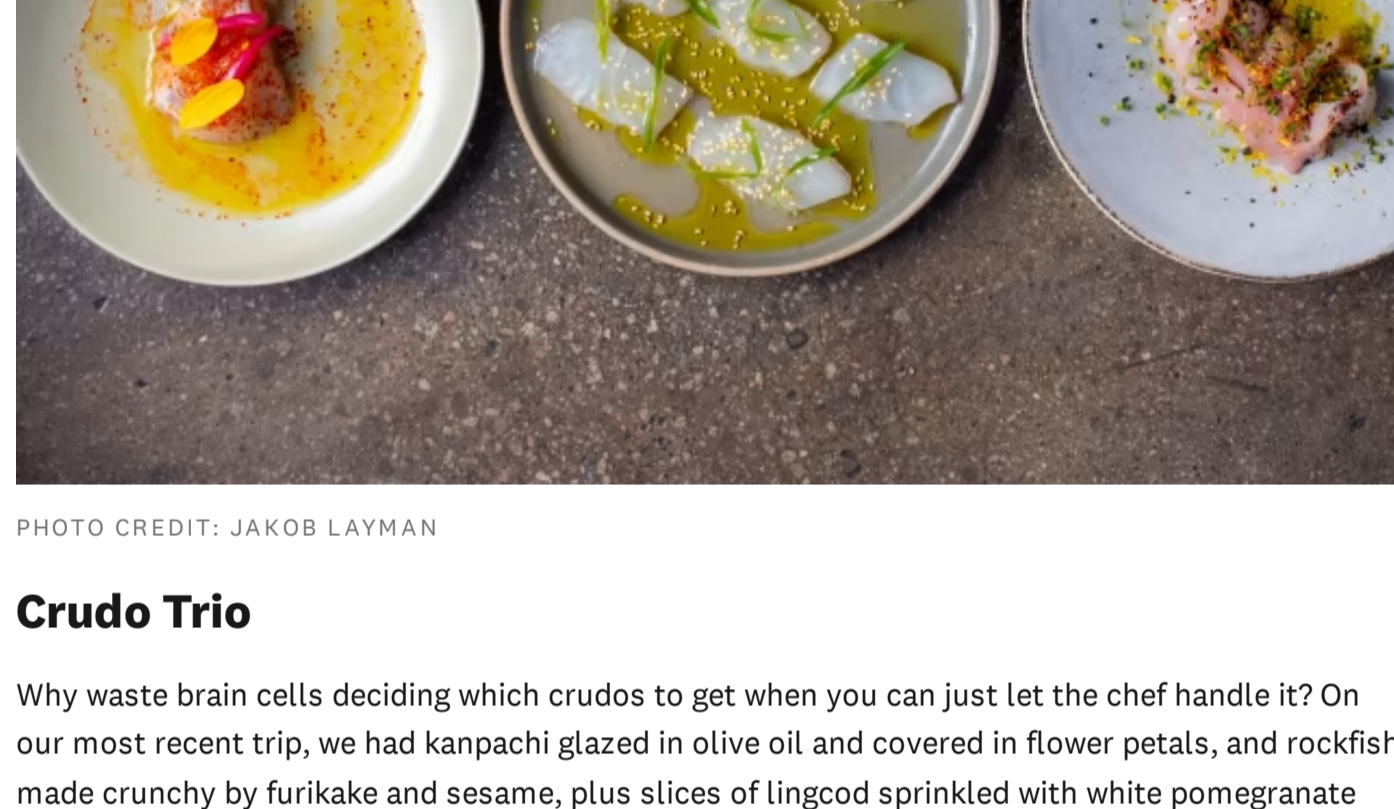


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

### Crudo Trio

Why waste brain cells deciding which crudos to get when you can just let the chef handle it? On our most recent trip, we had kanpachi glazed in olive oil and covered in flower petals, and rockfish made crunchy by furikake and sesame, plus slices of lingcod sprinkled with white pomegranate seeds. When it came to the last bite, we may or may not have physically jostled our date for it.

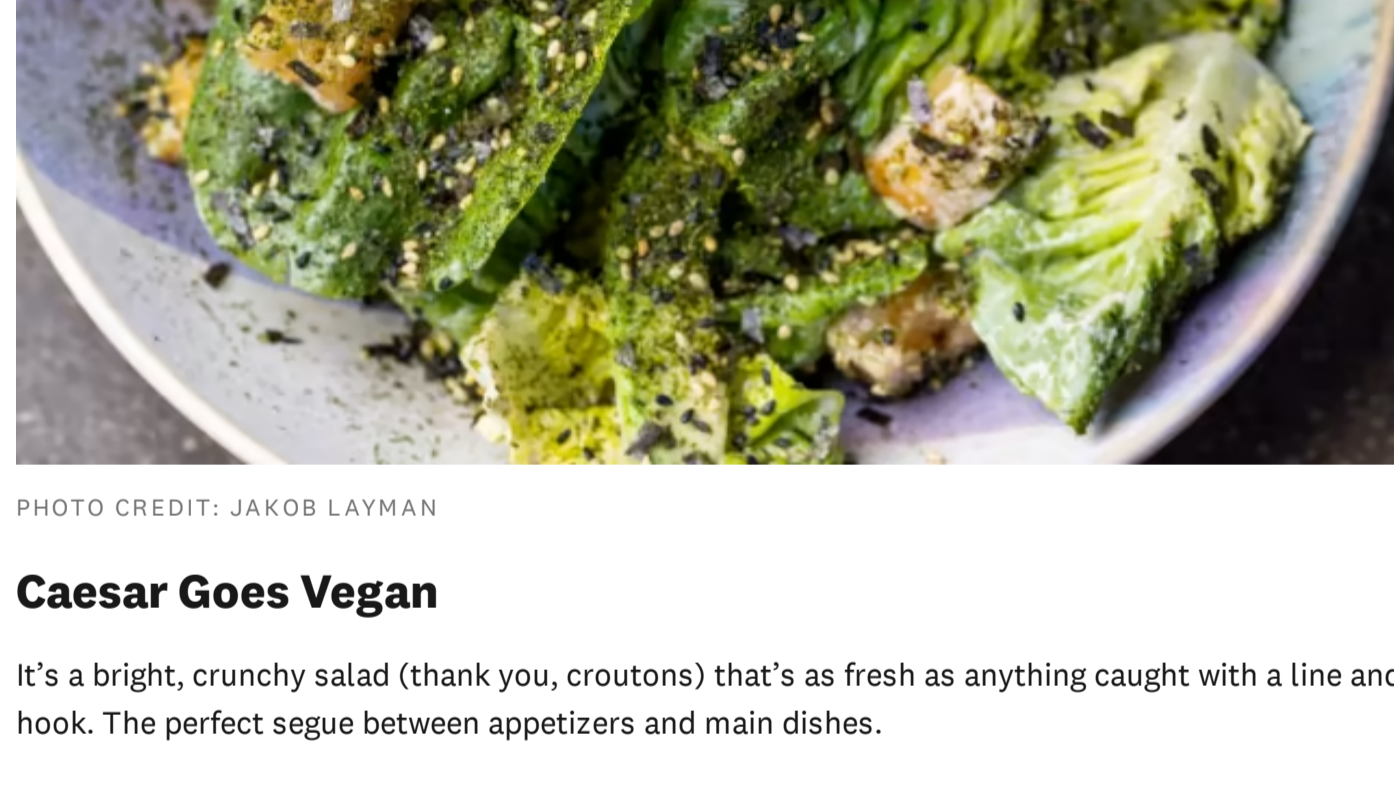


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

### Caesar Goes Vegan

It's a bright, crunchy salad (thank you, croutons) that's as fresh as anything caught with a line and hook. The perfect segue between appetizers and main dishes.

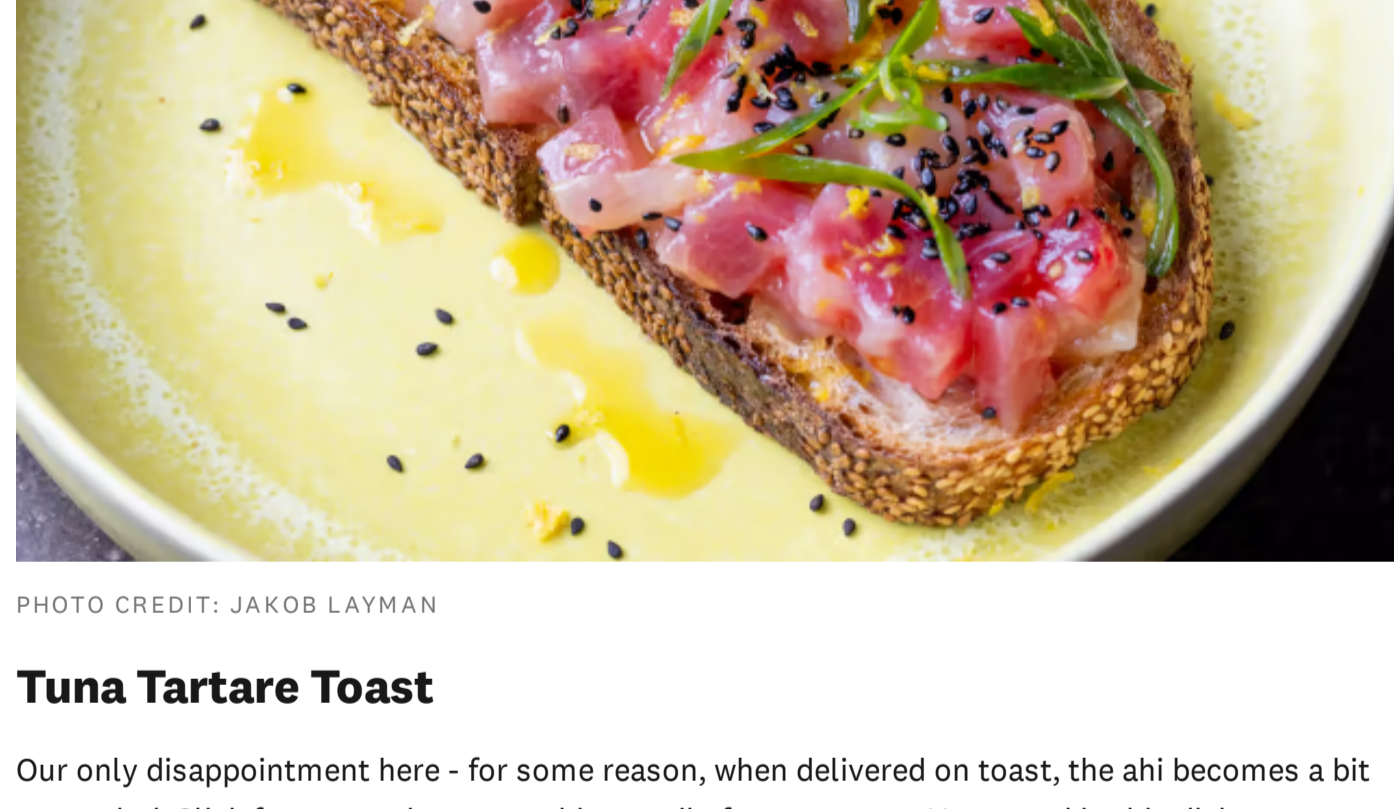


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

### Tuna Tartare Toast

Our only disappointment here - for some reason, when delivered on toast, the ahi becomes a bit congealed. Slick for no good reason, a bit too oily for our tastes. You can skip this dish.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

### Clams

You're going to want to whip out your camera as this bowl of clams is absolutely stunning. There's a rich, fragrant broth underneath made from white wine and fruity olive oil, plus the clams themselves are sprinkled with so much paprika and gorgeous herbs that you'll wonder if they came from the ocean or some idyllic nearby field. Use the bread to sop up as much of that broth as possible.

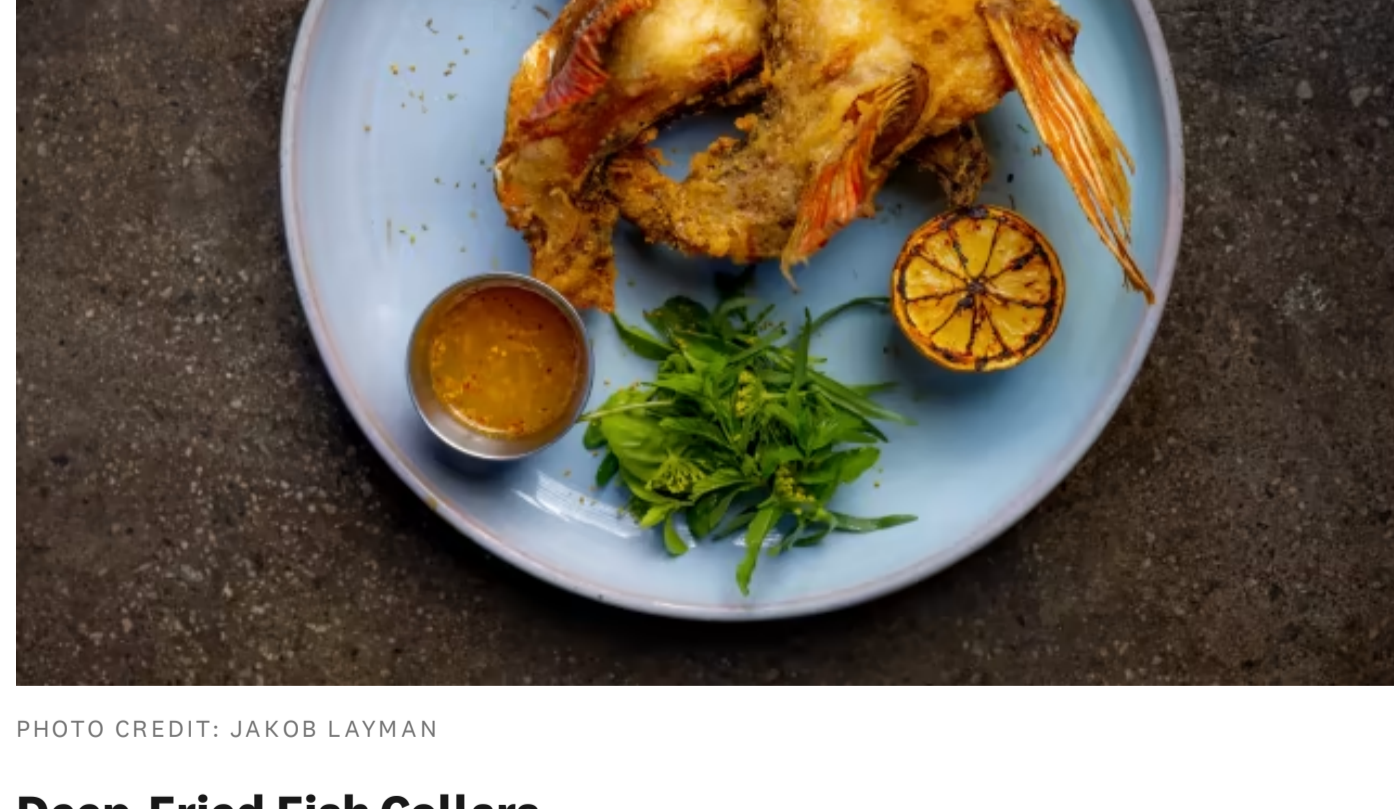


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### Deep-Fried Fish Collars

We probably wouldn't have ordered the fish collars, but our server insisted, so we did. Thank God. This cut is surprisingly meaty, running from the belly to right behind the gills, and filled with every part of the fish: skin, bone, rich chunks, and marbled fat caps. Deep-fried in a chickpea batter and served with a fish sauce vinaigrette, the fish collars at Crudo e Nudo are the perfect mix of succulent fish and crispy skin. In other words, *order this*.

### SUGGESTED READING

**Found Oyster** 9.0

SEAFOOD EAST HOLLYWOOD

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Lucious and plump, like Tom Hardy's lips, these were the oysters of my dreams.

**Dudley Market** 8.3

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