



SPLIT DECISION Many items on Above's menu are suitable for sharing, such as this fruit plate with selections from Eden Market, brie-melt, Marcona almonds and grapefruit sorbet.

Stairway to Eden

It's every chef's dream to have fresh produce, meats, fish, cheese and other ingredients right at his fingertips. Paul Lustbader lives that dream at Above Restaurant and Bar, located aptly above Eden Marketplace in South Orange, where he is the executive chef.

"It's a great resource," explains Lustbader, who works closely with the gourmet market to source food for the restaurant, much of which originates at the world-famous Hunts Point terminals in the Bronx. The CIA grad's credits include banquet chef at The Manor and executive chef at Highlawn Pavillion, both in West Orange, as well as his own restaurant, Trattoria Fresco, which had a six-year run in Caldwell.

Diners who come to experience Eden Gourmet's food married with Lustbader's talents might be surprised at what they find. Above is an expansive restaurant, which at capacity could fit more than 250 patrons in its dining room, bar, lounge and two outdoor patios, with room for another 50 in a third-floor pri-



ABOVE RESTAURANT AND BAR

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vate dining room. The vibe is predominantly Mediterranean (picture lots of tiles and fountains), reflecting one of the owner's Turkish heritage. While the seasonal menu does in fact have some Mediterranean touches, like the falafel and hummus appetizers, the dining experience is best described as contemporary American.

Lustbader says that since opening last August many patrons are enjoying the

options under cold plates and small plates, choosing to split several selections for their main course. There's lots of "fun food and sharing food" like sliders, fondue and flatbreads with unexpected toppings, such as Ahi tuna, wasabi cream and radish sprouts, or duck confit, fig jam and goat cheese. Many of the desserts are perfect for splitting, too, like the cheese, fruit and cookie plates.

Popular main dishes on the winter menu include the short ribs in Cabernet sauce, roasted rack of lamb chops and a grilled rib pork chop with house made sausage. They may be paired with savory side dishes, like charred mushrooms in white truffle oil or escarole and white beans.

With the weather warming up, plan to spend a pleasant evening dining al fresco on the rooftop patio. And look for more collaboration between Above and the market below: check their calendar for monthly cheese tastings, wine dinners and other special events. ■

— TERESA AKERSTEN