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Fine, Fresh Fare

Experience a next-level farm-to-table menu at Hualani's at Hōkūala Resort on Kaua'i

text **GINGER KELLER**



As the plane begins to descend to Līhu'e, Kaua'i, passengers are met with their first glimpse of the Garden Isle. Inescapable greenery coats the land and the historic Nāwiliwili Harbor comes into sight. Across the way sits Hōkūala, Timbers Resorts, a 450-acre natural amphitheater, which is home to Hualani's, an oceanfront restaurant, and the garden that sustains it

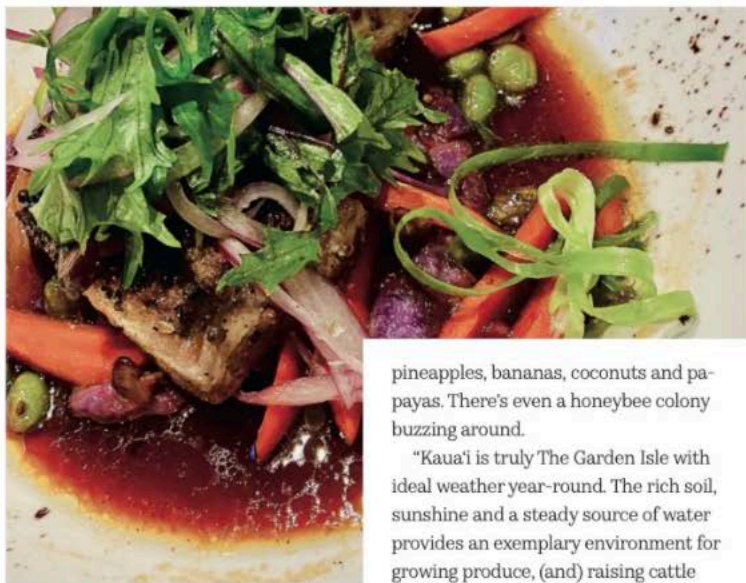
A unique concept, Hualani's—which is led by executive chef Zach Cummings—brings the term “farm-to-table”

to an entirely new level. Its menu specializes in Pacific Rim and island cuisine and comprises hand-picked ingredients from a neighboring 16.5-acre organic farm and orchard.

“The foundation for the dining experience is entirely based on a strong relationship between me and The Farm at Hōkūala's resident farmer, farmer Cody (Meyer), in addition to the partnerships we've formed with local cattle ranches and Kaua'i fishermen,” explains Cummings.

“Depending on what's available for the coming day or week, myself and our team will find creative ways to incorporate the fresh and seasonal ingredients we source daily to develop unique sensory experiences our patrons appreciate.”

On the overgrown 18-hole golf course-turned-organic farm, approximately 70 variants of vegetables and fruits flourish in abundance. There's everything from native plants—like kalo, noni and 'ulu—to traditional tropical fruits, like



pineapples, bananas, coconuts and papayas. There's even a honeybee colony buzzing around.

"Kaua'i is truly The Garden Isle with ideal weather year-round. The rich soil, sunshine and a steady source of water provides an exemplary environment for growing produce, (and) raising cattle and livestock," shares Cummings. "Being surrounded by the deep Pacific Ocean provides opportunities for catching and serving the freshest fish available. This allows for all ingredients to be fresh and non-GMO."

While most of its elements are gathered from the estate, Hualani's has also fashioned connections with the close-knit Kaua'i community. For produce outside of its bounds, the team visits a weekly farmers market, and for seasonings, it buys from local spice maker Tradewinds Spice Co. of Hawai'i. Open for lunch and dinner in an open-air setting, Hualani's menu features a vast array of options—perfect for any palate.

"Just about all of our menu items feature ingredients sourced directly from The Farm at Hōkūāla, but the most farm-forward dish we've just added to the menu is our new green papaya salad, which utilizes all farm-sourced ingredients."

For this, shaved green papaya meets watermelon radishes and Thai basil, and is tossed in a house-made papaya seed dressing, which is infused with Meyer lemons and honey harvested from the farm's apiary.

Meanwhile, as a way to pay homage to Hawai'i's state bird—and a frequent flyer in Kaua'i's skies—Hualani's dedicates a signature craft cocktail to the Hawaiian Nene goose with The Loose Nene utilizing local liliko'i, fresh coconut water and Tahitian



limes from The Farm at Hōkūāla.

For his concoctions, Cummings pulls inspiration from all areas of life. His pan-roasted market catch, for example, was influenced by his neighbor who hails from another Pacific island.

"Years ago, she cooked this Tahitian seafood coconut soup that I enjoyed very much. I wanted to recreate those flavors that brought me back to that day by infusing the Hōkūāla farm-grown coconut with lemongrass, Tahitian limes and apple bananas."

Of its most popular dishes, though, is the kiawe smoked 'ahi dip, a recent addition that was born in the peak of the pandemic.

"During that time, I was working on my new menu items for the reopening of Hualani's restaurant. I wanted to create a dish that could speak to the locals while sharing a traditional process of smoking our fish the way we do here in Hawai'i with our visitors."

Comparatively, the whole fried Hawaiian snapper, yet another locally caught option, is not for the faint hearted. As described in its moniker, an ehu or gindai is fried in its entirety to a crispy golden finish. It's served with namasu cucumber and a Thai dipping sauce.

"The local Kaua'i fisherman I work with to get my snapper know the size and quality I'm looking for and are able to consistently deliver... We are one of the very few restaurants on the island that are able to consistently get these Hawaiian snappers being served here at the restaurant, making it a special experience."

Dining at Hualani's is a special experience, indeed, and an exemplary introduction to the magic found on the Garden Isle. ♥



Chef Zach Cummings and Farmer Cody Meyer at The Farm at Hōkūāla. The Inamona Crusted Market Catch with Okinawan sweet potato, smoked carrots, and sweet and sour shiitake jus. Enjoy oceanfront dining in an elegant yet relaxed setting at Hualani's (photos courtesy Timbers Kaua'i at Hōkūāla).



Among Hualani's most popular dishes are its signature Whole Fried Hawaiian Snapper and Kiawe Smoked 'Ahi Dip (photos courtesy Timbers Kaula at Hokualea).