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**Simple yet unusual dining? It's Elemental**

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**By HSIAO-CHING CHOU**

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER FOOD WRITER

At the end of a small cul-de-sac by the Regata condominium complex is a little-known restaurant called [Elemental@Gasworks](#). The facade is so unassuming that people have stared right at it without realizing it's a restaurant; it's hidden away in plain sight.

Those who discover it, love it because it has the feel of one of those "underground" eateries -- but it's legitimate. And it's renegade cool.

If the site is unexpected for the business, which opened last year in September, so are the owners, Phred Westfall and Laurie Riedeman, and the conditions they've placed on their endeavor.

Nothing about Elemental is conventional.

When you sit down, Westfall pours you a glass of wine. If you ask what it is, he will say, "I'm going to let you taste it first."

"People get mad when Phred doesn't tell them what they're drinking," acknowledges Riedeman. "But people don't know how to let go and let us give them an experience."

Indeed, sans details, your mind and palate actually experience the wine without the typical preconceived notions. The flavors seem to be more vivid.

Most of the food is meant to be simple and straightforward -- hence the name of the restaurant. You may encounter seared albacore tuna with two kinds of beans, steamed Penn Cove mussels, beer-braised pork roast with macaroni and cheese. Or the more creative PB&J, made with sliced smoked duck, fresh-ground almond butter and pepper jelly on whole grain toast. All ingredients come from Whole Foods.

And yet, Riedeman, the cook, enjoys experimenting. She has concocted such "interesting" dishes as chocolate fettucine (chocolate crepe ribbons drizzled with truffle oil and shaved white chocolate) and ham and eggs (hard-boiled chicken egg, with yolk replaced by raw quail egg yolk and topped with wasabi tobiko, served with potato hash in a prosciutto cup).

The couple doesn't believe in tipping and charge menu prices that reflect what they need to survive. They want just enough traffic at their 14-seat restaurant, but not so much that the pair can't handle it: Riedeman cooks on two tabletop burners and has two ovens, and all the dishwashing is done by hand in a commercial sink.

They don't want press, and yet they need a little media buzz to do the job that word-of-mouth hasn't. They want customers, but they don't want people who won't get what they're doing.

Elemental used to operate out of the Watertown Hotel, but the couple were interlopers, setting up shop in the afternoon and packing everything up at the end of the evening.

"We had no sign, no phone, but people found us," Westfall says. "We were looking for something off the beaten path (for the new place). We didn't want to deal with general walk-in traffic, because you have to 'train' them."

All of this may sound tedious, and some first impressions about the place are that it is, but amid the young-restaurateur angst is a pure spirit.

"We like sharing foods and we like to taste lots of different wines," says Riedeman, who used to be a server at Union Bay Cafe, where Westfall was the dining room manager.

The menu consists of dishes that are \$5, \$8, \$11 or \$16. A three-course dinner runs \$30; glass pours of wine are a quarter of the bottle price.

Elemental's spare look, with an exposed ceiling painted in "Cocoa Puff" and walls in "Vanilla," is the handiwork of Westfall, who worked as an architectural draftsman for seven years. There are five tables and two seats at the counter. Many accoutrements are from Ikea.

Westfall used to own a wine shop in Port Angeles and likes to serve obscure, food-friendly wines. Riedeman was not trained as a chef, but she has worked in several restaurants and loves to cook. They are both in their 30s, live on a boat under the University Bridge, and ride a motorcycle to work.

Opening a restaurant was a chance for them to do whatever they wanted, which is to have a comfortable, laid-back place to share food and wine. If you go in with no other expectations, you'll fit in just fine.

## **IF YOU GO**

Elemental@Gasworks, 3309 Wallingford Ave. N., 206-547-2317; [www.elementalatgasworks.com](http://www.elementalatgasworks.com) Open Tuesday through Saturday; cocktail hour begins at 5 p.m.; dinner from 6 to midnight.

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*P-I food writer Hsiao-Ching Chou can be reached at 206-448-8117 or [hsiaochingchou@seattlepi.com](mailto:hsiaochingchou@seattlepi.com).*

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