

Wine Spectator

Manhattan Booming

Restaurants for wine lovers continue to multiply

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There's never a shortage of new restaurants in New York, and more than ever they feature excellent cooking and impressive wine programs. But neither talent nor commitment guarantees success in this town. The venerable Four Seasons restaurant is slated to close next year, pushed out by rising rent. Danny Meyer's first restaurant, Union Square Cafe, suffered a similar fate, though there are plans to open at a new location a few blocks north. Chevalier at the Baccarat, a very ambitious new restaurant with a star chef, is retooling its approach within months of opening. Here are five places that come out of the gate with real skill in the kitchen, dining room and cellar, reviewed by Wine Spectator editors in New York. Whether formal or casual, emphasizing obscure bottlings or established classics, effusing downtown cool or Midtown power, these recently opened establishments feature inventive and expertly executed cuisine alongside strong wine lists that display depth, breadth and character.

BÂTARD

Bâtard is the latest permutation of Drew Nieporent's patch of Burgundian inspiration in the Tribeca neighborhood. First came Montrachet, which opened in 1985, and where wine was the star (for a time it held the Wine Spectator Grand Award). The restaurant closed in 2006 and many of its rare Burgundies were auctioned off. Next came Corton, where the emphasis was on elegant refinement and haute cuisine. It closed in 2013. Bâtard (named, like its predecessors, for a grand cru in the Côte d'Or) combines the best of both worlds, offering an inspired menu overseen by Austria-born chef Markus Glocker, and a user-friendly and Burgundy-heavy wine list, managed aptly by head sommelier Jason Jacobeit.

It's a venue where you're quickly made to feel at home, from the pleasant hosts who usher you into a cozy beehive of activity in the main dining room to the young, well-mannered servers who are attentive without being imposing.

The menu is well-priced and prix fixe: two courses for \$55, three courses for \$69 or four courses (if you can find the room) for \$79, comprising a mix of appetizer-size dishes and main courses that can be served in just about any order you wish. A signature plate is the octopus "pastrami," lightly smoked, with morsels of braised ham hock; another appetizer portion, the lobster salad, was delectable, with avocado, tomato, jicama and sunflower seeds to complement the juicy meat. Stalwart main courses include veal tenderloin wrapped with a truffle-infused pastry crust. A nod to Glocker's Austrian roots comes via a crisp pork schnitzel, complete with potato salad.

About 60 percent of the 550-selection wine list is devoted to Burgundy, and Jacobeit and his staff will offer appropriate advice if you ask. Organization is based on pricing; in white Burgundy, for example, the selections start at \$36 a bottle for Maison Verget Terres de Pierres Mâcon-Villages 2013 and culminate at \$2,955 for J.-

F. Coche-Dury Corton-Charlemagne 2009. Among the whites, producers such as Leroy, A. & P. de Villaine, Dominique Lafon, Roulot, Raveneau and Ramonet are represented in bottlings from the level of basic Bourgogne blanc to grand cru.

Star producers on the red Burgundy side of the list include Marquis d'Angerville (Volnay 2011, \$180), Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier (Chambolle-Musigny 2012, \$244) and Domaine Dujac (Morey-St.-Denis 2012, \$238). As with the whites, there's a scattering of older vintages, including Jean Grivot Clos de Vougeot 2004 (\$348) and Ponsot Clos de la Roche 1997 (\$825).

There's also a nice selection of what Jacobeit refers to as "Teutonic whites," with options from Austria, Germany and Alsace, dominated by Rieslings and including wines such as the Jurtschitsch Heiligenstein Kamptal 2013 (\$67) from Austria and the Hugel Jubilée 2007 (\$142) from Alsace.

Bâtard delivers the goods as the dishes flow at just the right time from the kitchen. And while you have to be prepared to pay for the best from the Côte d'Or, rest assured that you can mine the list for more moderate pricing from Burgundy as well as other regions.

BÂTARD

236 W. Broadway

Telephone (212) 219-2777

Website www.batardtribeca.com

Open Dinner, Monday to Saturday

Cost Two courses \$55; three courses \$69; four courses \$79

Award of Excellence

GABRIEL KREUTHER

I first encountered Gabriel Kreuther's cuisine in 2002, at Atelier in New York's Ritz-Carlton hotel. His creativity was evident there, as during the decade he oversaw the kitchen at the Modern.

Since June, Kreuther has hung his name on the door of a new restaurant. A mix of modern design and traditional details that pay homage to his native Alsace, the space is both comfortable and elegant. Reclaimed wooden beams suggesting the half-timbered houses of Alsace's villages separate the dining room from the well-appointed lounge area, and there are separate menus for both spaces.

The menu gives a nod to Alsace as well, with dishes such as the tarte flambée (served in the lounge only) and sturgeon and sauerkraut tart. Kreuther's cuisine shows a light touch, with a creative juxtaposition of ingredients, sauces derived from vegetables, fruit or stocks, and textural components. For example, in the raw marinated diver scallop, the sweetness of the mollusk is offset by a tangy Meyer lemon confit and jalapeño coulis, with a light crunch from shaved black radish.

Smoke plays an artful role in Kreuther's cooking. The abovementioned sturgeon and sauerkraut tart comes to the table under a dome of apple wood smoke; nori campanelle and Alaskan king crab sit atop a puree of smoked parsnip; and the Mangalitsa lardo-poached Maine lobster exudes a light perfume of smoke.

Beverage director Emilie Perrier's wine selections, numbering 500, are more esoteric than classic. A good section of Alsace offerings includes several bottlings of Crémant d'Alsace, the sparkling specialty of the area. A page of Beaujolais reflects Perrier's native region, and there are nearly as many selections from Jura as from Burgundy and Bordeaux. Nonetheless, you can drink Château La Mission Haut-Brion Pessac-Léognan 1989 (\$950) or Château Margaux Margaux 1983 (\$1,750) if you want to splurge.

Another area of emphasis is lighter wines with lively acidity and traditional winemaking that leans toward organic and biodynamic. Domaine Gauby Côtes Catalanes White Les Calcinaires 2012 (\$70) aligned seamlessly with the braised fennel in a fennel seed-coriander broth that accompanied an entrée of daurade, and Domaine de la Pinte's Poulsard Arbois Pinte Bien 2011 (\$55) showed tart cherry, floral and earthy notes that enhanced the meatiness of the Mangalitsa pork.

The service at dinner one evening wasn't as flawless as might be expected from a restaurant at this level; lunch on another occasion was better. And the wine list needs a little more focus. Kreuther's talent deserves the best support to give his namesake restaurant all the elements required to be a top dining destination in New York.

GABRIEL KREUTHER

41 W. 42nd St.

Telephone (212) 257-5826

Website www.gknyc.com

Open Lunch, Monday to Friday; dinner, Monday to Saturday

Cost Four courses \$98

REBELLE

Expectations are high at Rebelle; it's overseen by the same team as next-door neighbor Pearl & Ash, a Wine Spectator Grand Award winner. General manager Branden McRill and beverage director Patrick Cappiello run the show, the former with quiet assuredness, the latter with rock 'n' roll swagger and an abiding passion for wine.

The rooms are comfortable and open: A long bar in front is followed by two dining rooms, the second of which has a skylight and a view into the open kitchen. Staff move about easily. The mood on most nights is ebullient.

Service is friendly, efficient and unobtrusive. Staff know the 15-dish menu's intricacies backward and forward. And while it is recommended that you order four courses, servers are flexible. But you should have four courses—to get a deeper experience of chef Daniel Eddy's brilliant food.

A scallop is seared and the center sliced out so that you get earthier outsides and a cleaner, sweeter inside piece. Slivers of green apple and turnip and a sauce of celery, parsley and apple lend sweet, crisp and vegetal accents. A perfectly tender piece of pork loin is accompanied by a crisp-tender fried ball of meat from a pig's head, with radishes and spring onions. There is a push and pull here between the simple and complex, various textures and weights. It's all done so deftly you could happily eat through a meal without thinking about it. Eddy has the chops from working with chefs like Michael Psilakis in New York, and Daniel Rose, a Paris bistronomie leader, but is confident enough that he does not need to show off.

Jessica Yang's desserts are also excellent. A St. Honoré presented fresh strawberries, puff pastry and mascarpone, while a Dulce chocolate cake had praline, barley and ice cream.

The almost 1,800-selection wine list focuses exclusively on the United States and France. While some more obscure and modish corners of the wine world are covered, the bulk emphasizes quality and accessibility. Recommendations by the wine staff—who speak with refreshing clarity, directness and accuracy about what to expect in a bottle—included Clendenen Family Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley Pip 2012 (\$59) and Eyrie Dundee Hills Chardonnay 2013 (\$56). And while there are bottles such as J.-F. Coche-Dury Corton-Charlemagne 2005 for \$5,995, there are also offerings priced in the twenties, and around 200 choices priced at \$50 or less.

The list, service and food promote a sense of inclusiveness and fun. Rebelle is in the category known as "fine casual": restaurants with excellent food and beverage programs, but that are more relaxed than the haute cuisine temples of old. Some others in this category leave out good service and comfort—even intentionally, it seems. At Rebelle, however, you have a team trained at very fine places that has now decided to run its own establishment at that level in every respect, while wearing whatever they want to work. The result is a place of uncommon grace.

REBELLE

218 Bowery

Telephone (917) 639-3880

Website www.rebellenyc.com

Open Dinner, Monday to Saturday

Cost Entrées \$26

TASCA CHINO

Tasca Chino has multiple personalities. Fortunately, the personalities are all fun by themselves, and none of them wants to kill the others.

Tasca Chino's menu fuses tapas and dim sum. The combination sounds forced, but Tasca Chino has two potent advantages. Alex Ureña is a chef's chef who has cooked in some of the best kitchens in New York and elsewhere. The owner is Simon Oren, whose numerous places include Wine Spectator Grand Award winner Nice Matin. His team, rounded out by beverage director Aviram Turgeman, knows how to deliver quality and service, and has always been strong on wine.

A long bar with a few high tables dominates the entrance. Two dining rooms are split by a striking service table. Tiled floors and wood accents are brightened by large, fun paintings of bullfighters and Mao Zedong. Where you sit can make a big difference here. The dining room can get loud and has some dark corners. Depending on the crowd and your mood, you might do better to sit at the bar.

If you feel like having tapas, Ureña offers textbook renditions of croquetas de bacalao with a light mustard aioli and patatas bravas with two zingy sauces. If these don't sound especially ambitious, they're not meant to be. There's nothing wrong with perfect, though, is there? Dumplings stuffed with shrimp, garlic and paprika, and resting on some housemade soy, were very good; chicken and chorizo dumplings were fantastic.

Other dishes try a little harder. A duck entrée had pickles, daikon and buns—make-your-own duck bao buns, basically. It's awkward work on a crowded, dark table, but all the elements were delicious, and it is typical of a smart but soulful Ureña invention.

If any of the specials appeal to you, order them. Ureña has done a fair amount of forward-thinking cooking in his time. This is the part of the menu where he shows it. Smoked trout on sweet and smoky carrot puree, Chinese tea and licorice, bound with an ethereal foam, was gorgeous and delicious. A crudo of brook trout served on a pink block of salt was topped with jalapeño, ginger, ponzu and olive oil. I would tell you to eat fast so it doesn't get too salty, but you will eat it fast anyway.

The wine list tops out at 175 selections, with some 25 by the glass, and there are also standout beer and cider picks, plus Sherry, of course. Like the menu, the beverage program encourages grazing. Order a glass of Sherry to sip while you make the bigger decisions. Spain dominates the list, but there are American, French and other wines too.

Recommendations included Quinta Couselo Albariño Rías Baixas Selección 2009 (\$57) and Ronsel do Sil Ribeira Sacra Vel'uveyra Godello 2013 (\$45). Keep looking, though, and you will find some surprises: Fontodi Flaccianello della Pieve 1988 (\$365) and a minivertical of Miguel Torres Penedès Gran Coronas Mas la Plana ending in 1975 (\$250).

Tasca Chino's theme might not make total sense, but the drinking there can be fun or serious, as you wish, and the disparate parts of the menu, in Ureña's hands, all come out delicious.

TASCA CHINO

245 Park Ave. S.

Telephone (212) 335-2220

Website www.tascachino.com

Open Dinner, nightly; lunch, Monday to Friday; brunch, Saturday and Sunday

Cost Entrées \$26 to \$36

UNTITLED AT THE WHITNEY

The new home of the Whitney Museum of American Art is a Renzo Piano-designed building anchoring the southern end of the High Line—a disused stretch of elevated rails that has been turned into a park and is a surprise tourist hit. There are multiple challenges to a restaurateur on-site. There will be people wearing fanny packs who just want Cobb salad and an iced tea, but it's the Whitney, so you have to be ready for the Champagne set too. The day is long; you can't really close for a couple of hours to prep for dinner.

The room is at street level, with glass walls on three sides, and indoor and outdoor seating. It does not appear overly formal, but it is design-y enough to feel special. Sunset is a beautiful time here, with the building across the street turning radiant pink.

Enter restaurateur Danny Meyer and chef Michael Anthony. Meyer has a restaurant at MoMA and also ran the uptown Whitney's dining room. And Anthony, who has been chef at Gramercy Tavern since 2006, seems perfectly suited to designing a menu that can be all things to all people. Anthony has always been a farmer's friend, but at Gramercy the emphasis remained mostly on major proteins. Here he is unfettered. Produce comes first, and is cooked with exceptional conviction. The few calamari rings in a generous dish of grilled pole beans and hazelnuts, though perfectly tender, are not the main attraction. The fluke is a vehicle for the brilliant, bright celery and makrut lime accompaniment.

Other dishes seem out of place until you try them. Why are there lamb meatballs in guajillo sauce with peanuts? Because they are so good that they dispel any rational argument. Why is there hummus? See above. The subtlety of the spicing is notable too; Anthony knows when to back off. He also knows how to smack you right in your pleasure center: If the cheddar potatoes with chicken gravy are on the menu, order them.

The list has some 230 bottles, mostly French, but with some from the United States and a handful of others. Beverage director Eduardo Porto Carreiro has priced nothing over \$300. Champagne Diebolt-Vallois Tradition NV (\$76) is a delicious way to start dinner and will bridge to a good portion of the menu, as will Domaine de Roally Viré-Clessé 2012 (\$58) and Domaine de la Taille Aux Loups Montlouis Sur Loire Remus Plus 2013 (\$59), which is essentially Chenin Blanc made in a Burgundian style.

The menu is arranged in four sections of five dishes each. The first three are smaller portions, the fourth larger. Order as you wish. A neighboring table "just wanted a salad" during a recent lunch. They ordered what is essentially a swordfish niçoise—it had a tomatillo vinaigrette, chopped olives and supremely tender and rich chunks of fish—and were very happy indeed.

UNTITLED AT THE WHITNEY

99 Gansevoort St.

Telephone (212) 570-3670

Website www.untitledatthewhitney.com

Open Lunch and dinner, daily

Cost Entrées \$24 to \$29

<http://www.winespectator.com/magazine/show/id/52164>