

## Drew Nieporent's Bâtard Is a Warhorse Ready for Battle -- Have a Taste

By Zachary Feldman Fri., Jun. 6 2014 at 1:05 PM  
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Photos by Zachary Feldman

The first thing you'll likely notice about **Bâtard** (239 West Broadway, 212-219-2777) is how warm the room feels, a far cry from previous tenant Corton's somewhat sterile atmosphere. And even though the monochrome color scheme had worked for chef Paul Liebrandt's elaborate cooking, the new room -- with its crystal chandeliers, dark wood floors, and golden lighting -- feels like a return to the space's heyday as downtown pioneer Montrachet, which helped owner Drew Nieporent launch the storied Myriad Restaurant Group empire that includes veterans Nobu and Tribeca Grill.

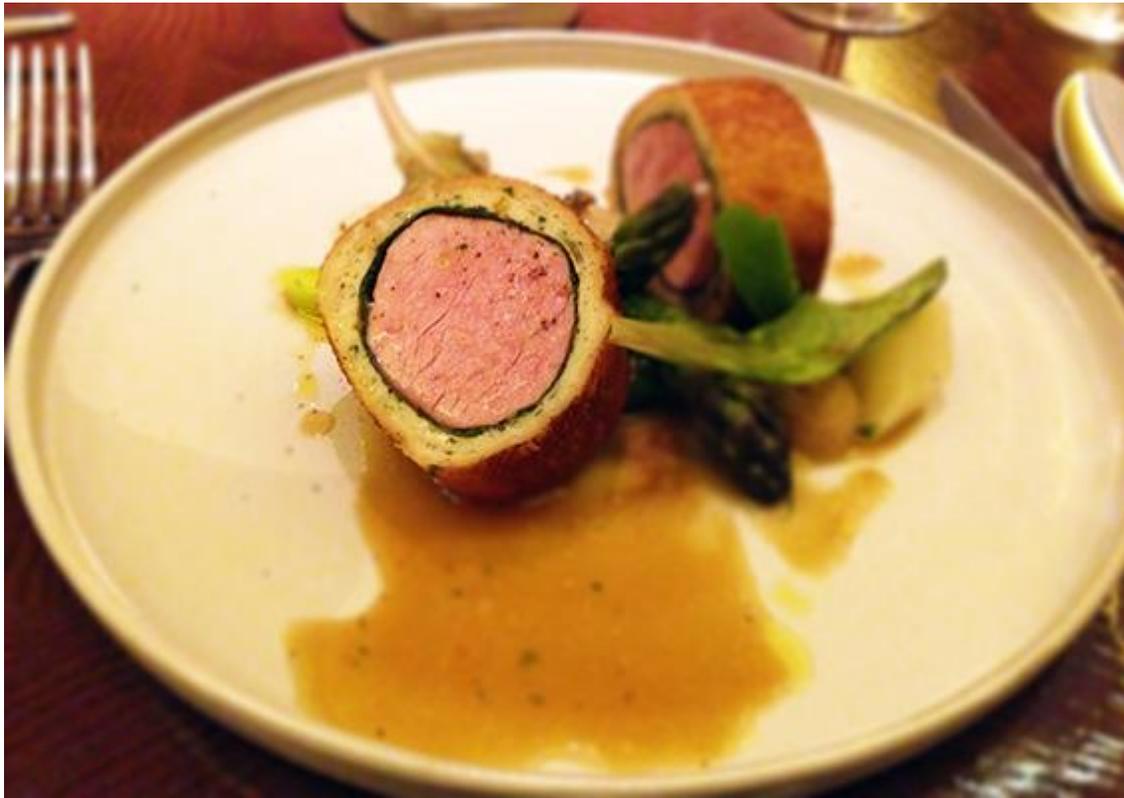


Over the past three decades, Nieporent has been the guiding hand at all three restaurants that have occupied the space. Montrachet opened here in 1985 with a then-unknown David Bouley behind the burners; 22 years later, Liebrandt came on for Corton. Now, the influential New York native has teamed up with former Daniel maître d John Winterman and Austrian chef Markus Glocker, previously of Gordon Ramsay at The London and Viennese Michelin two-star Restaurant Steirereck. Every restaurant at this address has been named for a French Grand Cru vineyard (this one comes from Bâtard-Montrachet), but the name 'Bâtard' carries multiple meanings, including a baguette-like French bread. And even if it didn't translate to "bastard" in English, the phonetic similarities allow for a playful, signature Ol' Dirty Bâtard cocktail (\$12). The Manhattan riff successfully mixes Jim Beam rye, Punt e Mes vermouth, Cocchi Americano rosa fortified wine, and mole bitters. As the anchor of a mostly classic -- and very serious -- cocktail list, though, there should be a Luxardo or Amarena cherry at the bottom of the glass instead of the dyed red maraschino number that holds court. Predictably, reds and whites from Burgundy feature heavily on the wine list, but ex-Tribeca Grill sommelier Jason Jacobeit has peppered the wine list with Italian, Californian, and Austrian varietals as well.

Glocker's food comes as two, three, and four-course prix fixes (\$55, \$65, and \$75 respectively), but there are no limits on a diner's course of action, which means that you can pick and choose from the menu's three sections to your heart's content. According to our waitress, no one has yet asked for four courses of straight entrees, but word is the kitchen will do its best to accommodate whatever you can dream up. And although Mr. Nieporent was ardent in his positioning of Bâtard as a more casual restaurant, buttoned-up plates like a block of octopus "pastrami" with potatoes, mustard, shredded ham hock, and croutons soaked in the ham hock braising liquid suggest otherwise. The cephalopod comes as part of the small plates section, joining items like seared ocean trout, marinated artichokes, and English pea soup with sweetbreads.



Plenty of other touches feel like fine dining, from pretty demi-loaves of caraway and sourdough breads to front-of-house touches like sauces poured tableside. Service overall is sagaciously cordial, but despite a plate of petits fours, no one amused our bouche. The dining room remains a near-windowless temple of gastronomy, and after countless nights squeezing between sardined downtown tables, there's a calm that pervades even when there's an ass in every seat. The ample stage allows Jacobeit and his team to roam freely, and every table is likely to get individual attention -- something that's sadly lacking at many new restaurants.



What would be main courses include grain options like black olive tortellini with preserved garlic and Parmesan risotto with nettles, green almonds, pickled sunchokes, and ramps. There's also baked turbot, rabbit, strip loin, and the menu's only supplement (\$15), a roasted lamb rack for two that comes with fava beans, lamb bacon, and confit lamb shoulder. Veal tenderloin wrapped Wellington-style in soft, toasted bread and spinach leaves anchors a rich spring plate, helped along by clean, firm white and green asparagus, mushrooms, and sauce diable (a French white wine sauce based on demi-glace) poured tableside. Visually, it's an admittedly fussy dish, but unlike the last restaurant that served food within these walls, it's more firmly rooted in classic European flavors.



There's no cheese plate listed, though we were told that the kitchen will whip one up. There is, however, epoisses, one of the world's stinkier cheeses and from Burgundy no less, which finds a place among the desserts. Brandy-ripened and unpasteurized, its consistency at room temperature is not unlike cheesy

caramel with a creamy, slightly barnyard flavor. Dressed with trumpet mushroom vinaigrette and topped with a quenelle of apricot puree, it's much more of a cheese-based dessert than a proper cheese plate. Still, it's a great way to experience the cheese in an atypical way. Ma Peche was doing this before they switched to their current dim sum format -- and long ago, David Chang served epoisses as a whole, pungent cylinder at Ssam Bar, rind and all. This one is nice and balanced.



The cheese preceded a final sweet course of fluffy Japanese milk bread encased in brûléed caramel. Spoon some macerated blueberries and brown butter ice cream on top, then drag each bite through dollops of fennel yogurt. It joins other desserts like key lime pie and a black forest-inspired number with various expressions of chocolate and cherry.

In the immediate, Bâtard feels like a return to form for Mr. Nieporent. Combined with chef Glocker's charming Austrian and German-inspired food and Mr. Winterman's approach to service, this warhorse is very much battle-ready.