

# Dining

## Cork and The Bottle Shop

Cutting edge culinary establishments are not new to the area: Beach Bistro, Divino's, Maison Blanche, Michael's On East, and Ophelia's are several that immediately come to mind. These restaurants pride themselves on being 'state of the art.' Welcome, **Cork!**

SoHo meets St. Armand's, as a 'dream team' moves into 'The Circle.' With contemporary silvers and blacks and whites — current and smooth without being slick and obnoxious — teammates Jeff Trefry, Mac deCarle, Jeremy Hammond-Chambers and Seth Groseclose develop and present a culinary faire that rivals any five-star version known to this fortunate food scribe! Cork truly rises up — without drifting too far!

Foie Gras: The Suite Life, Maine Lobster Parfait, Lamb Kidney's and Parmesan Black Pepper Biscuits are among the eclectic list of appetizer seductions. On this glorious evening, we sampled the Foie Gras, described as "A savory flan, a beggar's purse with Maitake duxelle and foie gras caramel black pepper and Banyuls reduction." We were not disappointed as it was pronounced without being over-exaggerated. The Parmesan Black Pepper Biscuits were probably the most creative and palate pleasing adventure that we have experienced in a while. Bayonne ham, green herb mayonnaise, and pepper jelly: the biscuits were moist and tasty; the consistency of the "cream" and ham were breathtakingly engulfed!

Perhaps this is a good time to note that as we glanced around the compact, yet comfortable, dining room (outdoor seating, as well), there was a lot of food sharing and affirmative-shaking of heads: always a most promising sign! The Crab Bisque was soothing and created with care in the classic French preparation. The Heirloom Tomato Soup with shaved fennel, the most delectable Point Reyes Blue Cheese, the freshest tomatoes, smoked paprika and sherry vinaigrette provided the ideal merging of presentation and performance — so delicious!

While ogling the enticing entrees, my partner and I initially decided on the Veal Scallops and Coriander Crusted Tuna, but were soon convinced to take a stroll through a tasting menu. The Porcini Crusted Diver Scallops



*A Sampling from The Bottle Shop*



*Mac deCarle, the executive chef of Cork*



*Inside The Bottle Shop*

were outstanding — sweet, creamy corn and classic-French string beans, with Parmesan milk underscored the quality of the scallops and re-enforced a most satisfying and lingering taste. Likewise the Orange and Coriander Crusted Tuna, with a definitive presence of pesto and fresh roasted, double strength tomatoes and pine was exquisite. Our Lamb Sirloin, with Babbaganoosh/Moroccan sausage and cocoa bean, addressed the savory need of both lamb lover, and non.

Our two final entrée tastings consisted of the Veal Scallops and Prime New York Strip. The black butter sautéed spinach/sauce and potato soufflé that accompanied the scallops were superb. The Prime New York Strip, wrapped in a smoked salt and sugar rub for 24 hours, served most compatibly with mustard demiglace, was tasty and fulfilling. The sunchokes and Parmesan potatoes solidified the dish's brilliance! I prefer a larger selection of wines by the glass, but apparently, they are already working on expanding this element.

Two dessert classics: a Crème Brulee and Chocolate Soufflé (with Bailey's Crème Anglaise) perfected the evening!

Cork presents a menu that is quite elegant, but nonetheless has "safe spots;" service is very attentive and professional (conducive to relaxation). Cork is the closest culinary experience to the preponderance of Maison Blanche — only much more approachable.

Heading downstairs, taking the winding sidewalk, traversing through a spacious, dining area with a visible kitchen and we found our way over to a "wine garden." **The Bottle Shop** promises little but delivers everything! This unpretentious but phenomenal eatery is in fact: A Brassier. How about a baguette with orange blossom butter, a caramel colored, "chunks of crab" bisque and/or a Swiss cheese soaked onion soup gratinee for starters? The menu is varied — fun — and inexpensive!

The salad options are outstanding. We opted for the Nicoise (seared

tuna, field lettuce, drunken eggs boiled in red wine vinegar; double strength tomatoes, nicoise olives and potato, with a roasted garlic and tomato vinaigrette) a healthy, creative pleasing adventure in itself! The Bottle Shop Salad (baby arugula, shaved fennel, pickled red onion, candied bacon, pulled brick roasted chicken and Point Reyes blue cheese with a Moro orange vinaigrette) is detailed and, well, voluptuous!

The pizzas, tarts, sandwiches, burgers, sole fingers and calamari — again, diversified, affordable, and enticing — were examined longingly. (We'll be back soon!)

This visit, we experienced generous tastes of Mussels Frites, Steak Au Poivre, Braised Lamb Shank Daube and Chicken Paillard.

The mussels: now our new favorite in the region. Tender mussels were fresh, with shaved fennel and frites on top and dipping them in the broth laced with Pastis (The French Appertif) made them oh so sweet. The Steak, served with Mac and Cheese (white) and blessed with grilled, green peppercorns, was juicy, tasty and cooked to perfection. The Lamb Shank, with polenta and roasted vegetables, was fall-off-the-bone terrific! The reduction sauce of pan drippings — blended and purified — along with the scent of subtle orange, made for a sinful encounter! And, the Chicken Mallard (shaved, pounded and seared) gave us no need for a knife. It was light, flaky, tasted and cut like butter!

With attention to detail and ultra respect for ingredients, the only thing that tops the presentations at the Bottle Shop (and Cork as well) is the flavors. And, the desserts follow suit! How about fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies and *milk* (yogurt, eggless custard pompage)? Or a fruit chateau made with the freshest of berries and cream?

**Cork and The Bottle Shop** now make St. Armand's Circle a culinary destination — professionalism, respect, service, affordability, culinary-variety, and architectural ambience: the total pleasurable adventure.

Find it at 29 N. Blvd. of the Presidents, St. Armands Circle. 388-1675

*An Auspicious Diner*