

Counsel's Table > column



By Michael Philippi
Ungaretti & Harris • Restaurant Critic

Simple, fresh food

Chicago is a great food city. From pork chop sandwiches at Jimmy's, the old Maxwell Street stand that people actually moved to west of the Ryan just south of Roosevelt, to the Barbie caviar staircase at Tru — we have something for everyone.

Restaurants open up nearly every day. Some are great; some are gone. How about the old ones? The ones that every time we go we say, "Man, this is great, why don't I come here more often?" Do we just toss them away? Do we forget about McMahon because of Cutler? I say make them earn their stripes.

I love places that look a little shady from the outside and then open up into Eden. If you do West Randolph then do it all the way to Loomis to one sixtyblue: one of the coolest places in town. A squat brick building framed by a mustard yellow entryway, this Michael Jordan restaurant is a place that you drive up to and your guests say, "HmMMM, I don't think so." Then they go inside.

The bar is sleek, black and chrome with a comfy couch area. Thursday's are "Burgers, Beers and Beats" nights. Get a serious burger for \$4 and listen to the deejay go to work. Try the Bell's beers — yummy in either the Amber or Oberon variety. Or a cocktail. The Ginger Martini tastes like summer — the right combination of sweet, tart and, well, ginger.

A lot has been written about Chef Michael McDonald and it's all true. Okay, he is not the guy from the Doobies, but man can he put out a menu. The theme here is simple, fresh food perfectly prepared.

The bread basket has Doritos in it. Real foodies would call them lavash, but this is a column for lawyers, right? Paper-thin triangles sprinkled with chili-like dust and sesame seeds to boot. We got more. Twice.

The wine list has a lot of bottles that I didn't

know. Fortunately the non-stuffy sommelier knew all of them. Since my enjoyment of good wine grossly exceeds my knowledge of it, I put us in his hands, which was a good call.

Hash browns and foie gras came first. Seriously. The hash browns were crispy and oniony and the foie gras exploded with flavor when you bit into it. Next was seared main scallops, tuna tartare and little shrimp dumplings. The tuna won. Perfectly textured with just the right



amount of pickled seaweed (battera kombu, if you want to impress your friends, kelp if you only want to impress them a little) and sesame. The scallops were generously portioned, sitting on top of a citrusy salad with pine nuts and olive oil. The citrus took the edge off the saltiness of the scallops, which I am pretty sure was the idea, but I could have done with a little lighter hand with the salt.

Dumplings are a universal food group (e.g. pierogi, ravioli, kreplach). The first key is texture and these were perfect. Translucent in the Asian tradition, firm enough to cut with a fork and still hold the inside goodies together — which in this case were shrimp and veggies that worked very well together.

The halibut never disappoints for a main-course choice. A good-sized portion with that crisped up skin that no matter how you try you just can't do at home. The fish is fork

tender without being mushy. This night it was served with citrus sabayon.

The free-range chicken is also a winner, with both dark and white meat and the skin crisped up and served on top. I think the only way to crisp up skin so perfectly is to hold it near the surface of the sun, but my son told me that it was probably deep fried. Killjoy.

Best in show goes to the duck. Duck can be greasy. It can be tough. It can be too rare. Or, it can be crispy on the outside and moist and tender on the inside, cut into bite-sized pieces and served along with bok choy and water chestnuts in a Thai barbecue sauce.

There are sweet and salty people. I am salty. I am cheese tray for dessert guy (which is a fine call here). However, Stephanie Prida is the pastry chef and while I don't know her either, I want to be her buddy because she does things with desserts that even the saltiest guys can't ignore. How about a chocolate soufflé tart — caramel, smoked almonds and vanilla ice cream? How about the sticky toffee date cake with toasted coconut ice cream? Or the sorbets? Or whatever else she is serving up.

Traveler's Tip: I travel a lot and find that I like to eat when I travel. When in Philadelphia, for example, I like to eat at Osteria — a big, open space, casual and full of good smells. At 640 N. Broad, in a somewhat sketchy neighborhood, it qualifies as off the beaten path, but its wood-fired pizzas, fresh-grilled meats and fish, especially the chicken alla griglia, are quickly getting a path beaten to its door. ■

Pleadings:

one sixtyblue
1400 W. Randolph St., 312-850-0303

Court costs:

Appetizers: \$9 - \$13; Entrees: \$19 - \$35

Rating: **Rating:**

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