

# DC

MODERN LUXURY™

## LIVIN' LARGE!

### HOT LIST 2006!

The 60 Newest, Now-est,  
Hippest Things to Do in DC!

### WILD ON WEDDINGS!

Dresses for Excess  
Cakes Go Couture  
Ultimate Aisle Style

### PLUS

Rachel Weisz Gets Steamed  
Bad Boy LaBute Brings it to DC  
Fusebox's Bright Young Thing  
...and all the best parties!

\*\*\*\*\*CARRI SORT \*\* C-035  
MOL  
BARBARA HAWTHORNE  
BARBARA HAWTHORNE INTERIORS  
1950 VALLEY WOOD ROAD  
MCLEAN VA 22101-4830 018000300000

PRINTED IN THE  
UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA  
BY  
MCMILLAN  
PUBLISHING  
INC.  
WASHINGTON, DC  
20004-2099  
ISSN 1080-4125  
FIRST PRINT 2006



# FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY AMANDA McCLEMENTS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARKO ZAGAR



The lounge at Le Paradou, left. Blue marlin carpaccio with tomato sorbet and tomato "tartar," above.

## FRENCH FLAIR *Sophisticated and seductive, chef Yannick Cam's Le Paradou continues to set the bar on haute cuisine*

As I cut into chef Yannick Cam's boudin blanc—the sausage barely protesting under the weight of fork and knife—the intoxicating aroma of truffles and foie gras rose from the plate. Practically melting on my tongue, the velvety sausage, perched over a bed of warm caramelized apples, delivered its heady, sensual flavor in slow, seductive waves. As I closed my eyes and savored the taste, a rosy flush began creeping into my cheeks. A deceptively homely sausage was making me blush, something I can honestly say no other food had done before.

I was back at the Le Paradou to check out a few changes made this summer to the downtown restaurant named for a small Provencal town, including adding a cozy lounge—designed by noted interior designer Barbara Hawthorne—to the bar area, a \$45 preheater offering and several new dishes to the menu.

When Cam and co-owner Michael Klein struck out to create their ultimate restaurant just a few years ago, they enlisted the expertise of DC's design virtuosos, Theo Adamstein and Olivia Demetriou, who helped erase the memory of the string of restaurants that came before, including Bice and Maloney & Porcelli. What they created is a modern yet timeless space awash in golden woods and a peaceful palette of beiges. Impressive flower arrangements, always fresh and fragrant, and a ceiling pricked with fiber-

optic stars lend a romantic vibe to the 60-seat main dining room where everything comes together with sophisticated elegance.

The same can be said for Cam's contemporary French cuisine. The Brittany-born chef, who started cooking in a professional kitchen at 15, made a name for himself in DC at Le Pavillon during the 80s by reinterpreting classic French cooking and bringing nouvelle cuisine to the forefront of the dining scene. After the restaurant closed in 1990, he followed with stints at Yannick's, Provence and Coco Loco in Washington and Le Relais in Great Falls. Today, Cam's menu says more with what's not on it than what is. Refreshingly absent are the foams, deconstruction and test tubes du jour. Instead, the chef focuses on flavor and technique, as seen in an appetizer of beautifully uncomplicated crab ravioli. The pouches of fresh pasta conceal a moist crab filling, while buttery hunks of lobster dot the plate and threaten to steal the crab's thunder.

While the the impressive menu offers enough enticing choices to feed you royally, and the preheater selections can get you one of the best deals in town and into your seat before showtime, the best way to experience Cam's artistry is to order the six- or nine-course tasting menu. "The chef makes it up on the spot," our waiter explained one evening. That means you're in the chef's hands—a very good place to be. **CONTINUED...**

CONTINUED... My meal began with several *amuse-gueules*, including a roasted lobster and salmon croquette. Keep your fingers crossed that one of those sent out is the chilled carrot soup, enriched with smoky Madras curry and a spoonful of carrot and ginger sorbet. The cold sorbet, the spice of the ginger, the sweetness of the carrot and the gentle heat of the curry play tug of war on your taste buds. -

A tangle of silver holding a hollowed egg followed, filled with creamy scallop brandade, the sweet meat glistening like it just popped out of its shell. Beneath the scallops sat a layer of creamy white corn flan, and above them a dollop of osetra caviar, creating a heavenly contrast of pastoral richness and clean ocean salinity.

Cam's seafood preparations have a way of casting the star in the best light possible. Thin rounds of blue marlin carpaccio, so pink they resembled slices of pickled ginger, were understatedly backed up by a smooth and acidic tomato sorbet and tomato "tartar." A more traditional tartar, this time salmon, was pungently spiked with the bite of shallots. Also on the plate were hard-boiled quail eggs, perched on Lilliputian toast rounds, one topped with *crème fraîche* and the other osetra caviar.

But considering the plummeting temperatures, the dishes that stuck with me—literally and figuratively—were the roast pigeon breast and the hearty rack of lamb. The former gets a sweet-savory treatment with dates, apples, cumin and soft red cabbage. Oh, and throw some seared foie gras on top for good measure! The lamb, so tender that juices streamed out with the first slice, was joined by woodsy girolle mushrooms, artichoke hearts, and quite possibly the creamiest polenta I've ever eaten.

Desserts at Le Paradou continue the theme of sophisticated presentation and intense flavor combinations. A delicate fig tart pierced with almonds was as attractive as it was satisfying. A wafer-thin slice of dried fennel plumed like a cockatoo feather out of the scoop of refreshing fennel sorbet crowning the tart. Equally artful, a round disk of dense, rich chocolate "savour" sits beneath a curved wafer with a single pistachio

each course—no simple feat considering at any given time you might have seven pieces of silver flanking your plate.

That attentiveness carries over to Le Paradou's wine program as well. The restaurant's talented 25-year-old sommelier and Jake Cyllenhaal look-alike, Nicolas Rouet, oversees an award-winning 1,200-plus-label wine list—heavy on French Burgundy and Bordeaux and boasting plenty of big names like Lafite, Latour and Ramonet—with all the authority of a sommelier more than twice his age.

Despite being just shy of two years old, Le Paradou has somewhat quietly secured a spot in the top tier of the city's restaurants. Sitting in the softly lit dining room, I couldn't help but feel under its spell. A meal filled with intense, yet simple flavors, and near flawless service left me with a heightened sense of well-being. Or maybe it was still the lingering flush from the boudin blanc. ■

**LE PARADOU** 617 INDIANA AVE., NW, 202.341.6790. **HOURS:** LUNCH MON-FRI, 11:45AM TO 2:30PM, DINNER MON-THURS, 5:30PM TO 10:30PM; FRI-SAT, 5:15PM TO 11:30PM. **WHO'S THERE:** SENIORS, LOBBYISTS, COUPLES CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES AND ELDER GOURMANDS. **WHERE TO SIT:** MOST TABLES IN THE SERENE SPACIOUS DINING ROOM FEEL LIKE PRIME REAL ESTATE. IF YOU'RE SEEKING A LITTLE MORE PRIVACY ASK FOR A TABLE IN THE BACK DINING ROOM WHERE A HAND-BLOWN GLASS CHANDELIER BY ROBERT KLUSTER, AGLOW IN SHADES OF PURPLE AND ORANGE, COMMANDS ATTENTION. **THE BAR:** AN A LA CARTE MENU INCLUDING SEVERAL DISHES OFF THE DINING ROOM MENU IS AVAILABLE IN THE BAR AND LOUNGE, WHERE YOU'LL FIND AN AFTER WORK CROWD SIPPING CHAMPAGNE AND RARE COGNACS AND SMOKING CIGARS. **ABOUT DESSERT:** PASTRY CHEF BENJAMIN STORAR TURNS OUT ELEGANT CREATIONS LIKE A RASPBERRY FINANCIER WITH TOASTED PISTACHIO ICE CREAM AND WHITE CHOCOLATE MOUSSE WITH CRUSHED PRALINES. THE PÊTIS FOURS ARE SOME OF THE PRETTIEST IN TOWN. **WHAT IT COSTS:** THREE COURSES, \$70; FOUR COURSES, \$90; SIX-COURSE TASTING MENU, \$110; NINE-COURSE CHEF'S TASTING MENU, \$145; PREHEATER MENU, \$45; TWO-COURSE LUNCH, \$30; THREE-COURSE LUNCH, \$38. **RATING: ★★★★★**

**What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambiance and service.**

*TODAY, CAM'S MENU SAYS MORE WITH WHAT'S NOT ON IT THAN WHAT IS. REFRESHINGLY ABSENT ARE THE FOAMS, DECONSTRUCTION AND TEST TUBES DU JOUR. INSTEAD, THE CHEF FOCUSES ON FLAVOR AND TECHNIQUE.*

balanced on top, reminding me of the Capitol dome just a handful of blocks east. The herbal punch of thyme-infused cream, a surprising partner, cuts through the concentrated dark chocolate flavor.

Backing up Cam's luxurious cooking is some of the best service in the city. Though the lily-perfumed dining room can be about as quiet as a museum, the servers, who like the rest of the staff are mostly French, are numerous and visible, positioned along the walls in dark suits like security guards watching over an art exhibit. There were moments when the hushed formality sent me back to childhood, when you were never quite sure you were using the right fork but were sure someone was watching. Le Paradou feels like a place where you need to mind your manners. When the dining room is full—usually with a Washington VIP or three scattered about—clinking glasses and hearty laughter fill the room, but on slower nights, the silence, save the softly playing jazz, can be oppressive.

But even though it sometimes feels like the servers outnumber the guests, that translates to a level of service rarely found in DC's other top dining rooms. On each visit, every staff member seemed cued to our entrance, offering a polished welcome as we were led to our table through the warmly lit lounge. The servers perform an almost silent dance, weaving around the room in a coordinated, seamless routine, ensuring no abandoned napkin goes unfolded, no desire unfulfilled. Once the parade of dishes begins, the proper silverware seems to appear out of thin air before



Image: dining room at Le Paradou