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LATEST EVENTS

- The Firebugs, A Morality Play Without a Moral**
 October 1, 2010 (7:30 pm)
(Theater)
- Indian Bread Baking**
 October 6, 2010 (11:00 am)
(Food)
- Evening of Exploration**
 October 6, 2010 (6:30 pm)
(Special Event)

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CLASSIFIEDS

- Professional Massage Therapy Services**
 For Sale Therapeutic (28.09.2010)
- DYING WITH CONFIDENCE**
 For Sale Classes (24.09.2010)
- Santa Fe 2 Bed 1.5 Bath (87505 zip code)**
 For Sale Real Estate (20.09.2010)
- ABQ Nanny Jobs (FT, PT, Live-In/Out)**
 Wanted Household (20.09.2010)
- Wonderful Tuscany Home!**
 For Sale Houses (20.09.2010)

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Bistro on the corner



Friday, 03 September 2010



Photo by Wes Naman

With a simple, inexpensive menu of fresh French fare (and a killer croque-monsieur) a small corner bistro makes a big statement

By Kevin Hopper

Can a sandwich really change your life? It's such a trivial, fleeting thing when you think about it. It's only bread, meat, maybe some cheese and some sort of condiment. And after you finish it, it's only a memory. Given that, how groundbreaking or life-altering can a mere sandwich be?

You tell me when you pay a visit to Downtown's newest jewel of a restaurant: **P'tit Louis**. Consider it a foodie challenge of sorts. Sometime soon, make your way to the corner of 3rd and Gold. You can't miss the building; it's the one that looks as if it was transported from Paris in a time machine from the year 1904. This is reinforced when diners walk in, sit down in one of the few French bistro chairs available in the tiny dining room and take in P'tit Louis' remarkable atmosphere.

Co-owners **Christophe Decarpentries'** and **John Phinizy's** attention to cultural detail and specific time period is immediately apparent in the handmade art nouveau bar, the intentionally scruffy black and white hexagon-tiled floor, the old school ring of the phone and the Edith Piaf-heavy soundtrack. On top of the starched white tablecloths are small French flags. On the wall is a large reproduction of **Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's** "Moulin Rouge — La Goulue." For contemporary diners who weren't alive and living in France at the turn of the century (a.k.a. - everyone), consider P'tit Louis a living museum of sorts.

Now back to that sandwich.



Photo by Wes Naman

I've eaten many a croque-monsieur in my time, the most notable of which was long ago at an equally quaint bistro in Montréal, as close to France as one can get on this continent. And though I can't well remember how that one tasted in comparison to the one on the P'tit Louis menu, that doesn't really matter. This seemingly simple preparation — French ham and a layer of rich béchamel sauce on fresh bread topped with melted gruyère — is lifted to legendary status here. Take one bite and I'll bet you immediately close your eyes. Once you do, I further guarantee that your mind lifts you away to a serene setting where everything is "right." This forces you to instinctively chew much slower so as to savor that newfound serenity.

Yes, it's that good.

As for the rest of the menu here, which is delightfully succinct and moderately priced, consider the croque-monsieur a rather grande amuse-bouche. To absorb the entire sum of this welcome addition to the somewhat lackluster Downtown dining scene, will take repeated visits. After all, one can't order in a single sitting all four fresh mussel preparations — curry, piquante, Roquefort and marinières. Nor can you enjoy the rest of the sandwich offerings, which include very French ingredients like duck confit, Camembert, Morbiér and good old-fashioned butter. Not mayo, not mustard, but butter. Beautiful! "Le Sandwiches" prices range from \$5.50 to \$8.50, each worth every last franc.

Upon repeated late afternoon visits — the best time to dine here due to the bistro's hectic lunch crowd — I have been graced with a variety of dishes boasting the freshest ingredients available, as well as seldom utilized ingredients like lardons or goose liver. Among my favorites are **Endives au Roquefort** (\$7.50), **Salade Campagnarde** (\$9.50) and **Sept Fromages** (\$11.50). The latter is an assembly of seven fresh exotic cheeses that vary upon availability. This dish alone, along with a simple glass of wine (available in only "rouge" or "blanc"), should be enough to satisfy a table of two.



Photo by Wes Naman

And it's this type of meal — reserved and spare but prolonged — that is called for at P'tit Louis Bistro, which is also co-owned by **Scalo** and **Brasserie La Provence** owner **Steve Paternoster**. Unfortunately, since the bistro is only open weekdays from 10:30a to 5:30p, traditional work schedules will likely prove to be a hurdle.

Admittedly, this reviewer hasn't done all of his homework. This includes tasting the **Escargots de Bourgogne** (snails in garlic butter, \$7.50), the **L'Assiette de Charcutaille** (cold cuts and paté, \$11.50) or **La Quiche du Jour** (\$8.50). Don't worry, I'll get there.

I did, however, taste three fresh oysters (available every Thu., Fri. and Sat.) that I was told were pulled from Massachusetts Bay less than 24 hours earlier. Post-slurp, the delicate brininess and al dente-like bite was testament to this purported freshness.

The final coup de grâce, of course is dessert, which at this point has only come in the form of a traditional **Tarte Tatin** (\$5.50). If you're looking for overt sweetness, look elsewhere. This simple preparation was more about contrasts in texture: the softness of the caramelized apple against the flaky tarte and only a hint of sweetness. Other desserts (all \$5.50) are to be expected at a true-to-form bistro: **Chocolate Mousse**, **Crème Brulée** and a **Lemon Tarte** and should expect to be eaten very soon by this more-than-satisfied reviewer. But the challenge still stands, so you be the reviewer and drop in to P'tit Louis Bistro at your earliest convenience.

P'tit Louis Bistro

228 Gold SW, 505.314.1111

Hours: 10:30a-5:30p, Mon.-Sat.

Reservations strongly recommended

ptitlouisbistro.com
