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Sidebars: Chef Joseph's provides sophisticated dining

Jennifer Lukemeyer , Fred Vaiana December 21, 2011 KEYWORDS

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SIDEBARS Jennifer Lukemeyer Frederick Vaiana

Have you ever walked into a restaurant and thought, "Wow, I really could spend the afternoon here sipping sophisticated wine or drinking sophisticated drinks while chatting it up with friends about sophisticated stuff and acting all sophisticated?" I

found that cozy and inviting place right around the corner from the courthouse. Chef Joseph Heidenreich, formerly of California Café and Agio, opened Chef Joseph's at the Connoisseur Room just weeks ago and is easing into it by currently offering only lunch and occasional special tastings and dinners. If the lunch we had is indicative of what his deliberateness produces, downtown Indy luckily has a new experience in executive dining that is top notch.

The richly decorated space conveys class while being very inviting. The service was spot on. All orders are taken on an iPhone, and your server can show you pictures of the menu items. Joining me was Tyler Helmond of our office and soon-to-join-our-office Jeff Baldwin. Having to wait on Jeff (which will be absolutely unacceptable in our office to force any of us to wait for food – especially Voyles and Jenny), Tyler and I ordered a small plate of the asparagus tempura, manchego cheese and garlic mayonnaise. The tempura batter lightly and perfectly encased six big, fresh stalks of asparagus, and they were not overwhelmed with the cheese or mayonnaise. Other small plates included sweet potato empanada with gorgonzola and a balsamic glaze as well as prosciutto and orange onion compote bruschetta with Asiago cheese. These selections are perfect for sharing.

The next decision was for entrees. Jeff took an unacceptable amount of time to make up his mind, leading to a second admonishment about keeping us waiting for food. It was worth the wait though. I waffled between the bacon, butter lettuce and tomato salad with blue cheese dressing and the chive lamb brat with fettuccini. Ultimately, I decided on the latter. The lamb made the dish, coming fresh from Viking Lamb in Seymour, Ind. The pomodoro sauce was helped by the peppers, onions and Asiago cheese. Tyler struggled with whether to order the Caesar salad with avocado, spicy fried croutons and manchego cheese with or without grilled chicken breast. Quite frankly, I bet you could sprinkle spicy fried croutons on an old shoe and it would taste good. However, he ended up with an open-faced sandwich consisting of grilled chicken breast topped with prosciutto, cream sauce and melted Swiss cheese. A bit of a tang in the sauce he could not put his finger on, but we didn't hear a peep out of him the rest of lunch as he declared it one of those treats he'll later crave and have to return for. Quality prosciutto made the dish more special. Finally, Jeff decided on the Angus burger, which he declared was perfectly cooked as he had ordered and was topped with bacon, lettuce, tomato, spicy mayonnaise and Gorgonzola cheese. What he appreciated most was the fresh ciabatta bread on which the burger was served that didn't snap your jaw because it was over a day old. The house fried chips were plentiful and delicious.

Other offerings include: northern Spanish beef stew; a sautéed winter flounder with brown and wild rice, tarragon and green apple butter with carrot relish; a Mediterranean chop salad in a shell with feta cheese and mint vinaigrette; slow roasted pork with black beans, fried plantain and pico de gallo; and a mahi mahi sandwich with a barbecue glaze. You have some thematic ingredients such as prosciutto and the few cheeses used in the dishes, but the limited menu reflects Chef Joseph's dedication to serving high-quality meals instead of going for quantity. It goes to show that deliberateness pays off in delivering a quality product.

Chef Joseph's at the Connoisseur Room is located at 115 E. Ohio St. in downtown Indianapolis. Check out the website, www.chefjosephs.com and get there for a sophisticated lunch experience that

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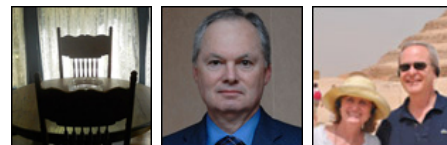
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ultimately will be a sophisticated drinking and dinner experience when he is ready!

Fred Vaiana and Jennifer M. Lukemeyer practice at Voyles Zahn Paul Hogan & Merriman in Indianapolis, focusing in criminal defense. Vaiana is a 1992 graduate of the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. Lukemeyer earned her J.D. from Southern Methodist University in 1994 and is active in the Indianapolis Bar Association, Indianapolis Inn of Courts and the Teen Court Program. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the authors.

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