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As Not Seen on TV

By PETE WELLS

GUY FIERI, have you eaten at your new restaurant in Times Square? Have you pulled up one of the 500 seats at Guy's American Kitchen & Bar and ordered a meal? Did you eat the food? Did it live up to your expectations?

Did panic grip your soul as you stared into the whirling hypno wheel of the menu, where adjectives and nouns spin in a crazy vortex? When you saw the burger described as “Guy's Pat LaFrieda custom blend, all-natural Creekstone Farm Black Angus beef patty, LTOP (lettuce, tomato, onion + pickle), SMC (super-melty-cheese) and a slathering of Donkey Sauce on garlic-buttered brioche,” did your mind touch the void for a minute?

Did you notice that the menu was an unreliable predictor of what actually came to the table? Were the “bourbon butter crunch chips” missing from your Almond Joy cocktail, too? Was your deep-fried “boulder” of ice cream the size of a standard scoop?

What exactly about a small salad with four or five miniature croutons makes Guy's Famous Big Bite Caesar (a) big (b) famous or (c) Guy's, in any meaningful sense?

Were you struck by how very far from awesome the Awesome Pretzel Chicken Tenders are? If you hadn't come up with the recipe yourself, would you ever guess that the shiny tissue of breading that exudes grease onto the plate contains either pretzels or smoked almonds? Did you discern any buttermilk or brine in the white meat, or did you think it tasted like chewy air?

Why is one of the few things on your menu that can be eaten without fear or regret — a lunch-only sandwich of chopped soy-glazed pork with coleslaw and cucumbers — called a Roasted Pork Bahn Mi, when it resembles that item about as much as you resemble Emily Dickinson?

When you have a second, Mr. Fieri, would you see what happened to the black bean and roasted squash soup we ordered?

Hey, did you try that blue drink, the one that glows like nuclear waste? The watermelon margarita? Any idea why it tastes like some combination of radiator fluid and formaldehyde?

At your five Johnny Garlic's restaurants in California, if servers arrive with main courses and find that the appetizers haven't been cleared yet, do they try to find space for the new plates next to the dirty ones? Or does that just happen in Times Square, where people are used to crowding?

If a customer shows up with a reservation at one of your two Tex Wasabi's outlets, and the rest of the party has already been seated, does the host say, "Why don't you have a look around and see if you can find them?" and point in the general direction of about 200 seats?

What is going on at this new restaurant of yours, really?

Has anyone ever told you that your high-wattage passion for no-collar American food makes you television's answer to Calvin Trillin, if Mr. Trillin bleached his hair, drove a Camaro and drank Boozy Creamsicles? When you cruise around the country for your show "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," rasping out slangy odes to the unfancy places where Americans like to get down and greasy, do you really mean it?

Or is it all an act? Is that why the kind of cooking you celebrate on television is treated with so little respect at Guy's American Kitchen & Bar?

How, for example, did Rhode Island's supremely unhealthy and awesomely good fried calamari — dressed with garlic butter and pickled hot peppers — end up in your restaurant as a plate of pale, unsalted squid rings next to a dish of sweet mayonnaise with a distant rumor of spice?

How did Louisiana's blackened, Cajun-spiced treatment turn into the ghostly nubs of unblackened, unspiced white meat in your Cajun Chicken Alfredo?

How did nachos, one of the hardest dishes in the American canon to mess up, turn out so deeply unlovable? Why augment tortilla chips with fried lasagna noodles that taste like nothing except oil? Why not bury those chips under a properly hot and filling layer of melted cheese and jalapeños instead of dribbling them with thin needles of pepperoni and cold gray clots of ground turkey?

By the way, would you let our server know that when we asked for chai, he brought us a cup of hot water?

When you hung that sign by the entrance that says, WELCOME TO FLAVOR TOWN!, were you just messing with our heads?

Does this make it sound as if everything at Guy's American Kitchen & Bar is inedible? I didn't say that, did I?

Tell me, though, why does your kitchen sabotage even its more appealing main courses with ruinous sides and sauces? Why stifle a pretty good bison meatloaf in a sugary brown glaze with no undertow of acid or spice? Why send a serviceable herb-stuffed rotisserie chicken to the table in the company of your insipid Rice-a-Roni variant?

Why undermine a big fist of slow-roasted pork shank, which might fly in many downtown restaurants if the General Tso's-style sauce were a notch less sweet, with randomly shaped scraps of carrot that combine a tough, nearly raw crunch with the deadened, overcooked taste of school cafeteria vegetables?

Is this how you roll in Flavor Town?

Somewhere within the yawning, three-level interior of Guy's American Kitchen & Bar, is there a long refrigerated tunnel that servers have to pass through to make sure that the French fries, already limp and oil-sogged, are also served cold?

What accounts for the vast difference between the Donkey Sauce recipe you've published and the Donkey Sauce in your restaurant? Why has the hearty, rustic appeal of roasted-garlic mayonnaise been replaced by something that tastes like Miracle Whip with minced raw garlic?

And when we hear the words Donkey Sauce, which part of the donkey are we supposed to think about?

Is the entire restaurant a very expensive piece of conceptual art? Is the shapeless, structureless baked alaska that droops and slumps and collapses while you eat it, or don't eat it, supposed to be a representation in sugar and eggs of the experience of going insane?

Why did the toasted marshmallow taste like fish?

Did you finish that blue drink?

Oh, and we never got our Vegas fries; would you mind telling the kitchen that we don't need them?

Thanks.

Guy's American Kitchen & Bar

POOR

220 West 44th Street (Seventh Avenue), (646) 532-4897, guysamerican.com.

ATMOSPHERE 500 seats, three levels, three bars, one chaotic mess.

SERVICE The well-meaning staff seems to realize that this is not a real restaurant.

SOUND LEVEL Rawk and roll, but at moderate volumes.

RECOMMENDED Roasted Pork Bahn Mi, General Tso's Crispy Pork Shank, Cedar Plank Salmon with Jalapeño Apricot Jam.

DRINKS AND WINE Margaritas, while too sweet and strong, are the best cocktails. Draft beers are better than the largely dull wines.

PRICES Soups, salads and appetizers, \$8.95 to \$16.50; sandwiches, pastas and main courses, \$16.95 to \$31.50.

HOURS Sunday to Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to midnight; Thursday to Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 1 a.m.

RESERVATIONS Accepted.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS The bar area and an accessible restroom are on street level.

WHAT THE STARS MEAN Ratings range from zero to four stars and reflect the reviewer's reaction primarily to food, with ambience, service and price taken into consideration.

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CHARLESTON CITY PAPER

FOOD+DRINK » RESTAURANT REVIEWS

October 20, 2010

Bin 152 and Enoteca offer simple fare and unique charm

Good Pairings

by Brys Stephens



Brys Stephens

A dish of Barolo di Testun cheese with mushroom Agro Dolce at Enoteca.

As you walk south down King Street, the bustling jumble of college shops and clothing stores gives way to a quieter blend of antique and jewelry shops, and the dining options dwindle. Then a block before Broad, Bin 152 is a welcome oasis, a surprisingly European-feeling bar serving carefully chosen wines, beer, cheese, and charcuterie, giving wayward pedestrians a reason to stop in and have a seat. It's been open about a year, and owners Patrick and Fanny Panella have found their niche.

Patrick knows the wine, and Fanny knows the food. The wine list is constantly changing and evolving.

"It's a work in progress," he says. "I want to keep a variety of regions, varietals, and price points. I'm constantly trading out wines. Now that it's getting cooler, I'm moving in more reds." He also constantly tastes. "Tuesdays are my biggest tasting days. Everyone thinks it's fun; it's work."

The bar's bottle prices range from about \$28 to \$300, and glasses (about 25 at last check) from \$7 to \$16 (Patrick says they'll sell half glasses if customers ask). Varietals are a good mix of Old and New World, with an increasing lean to the Old. Each have their own charm, and Patrick is happy to make recommendations. They also serve a handful of beers, like Pilsner Urquell, Guinness, and even Pabst Blue Ribbon.

How does Fanny choose the cheese and charcuterie? With similar discernment. Though the offerings are familiar — cheeses like Camembert, Taleggio, Stilton, and Roquefort, and cured meats like speck, bresaola, coppa, and chorizo — she tastes multiple varieties of each for her favorite characteristics. Generous portions of both are offered for \$7, along with plenty of fresh baguette slices — and none disappoint. The alluring Speck Alto Adige, for instance, is a smoked and dry-cured ham with a subtle juniper flavor. It's similar to prosciutto but because it's smoked, its texture is pleasingly firm and even chewy, satisfying for even the fiercest umami craving. All of the charcuterie and cheeses have their own interesting characteristics, so suffice it to say that the selections are as good as you'll find in Charleston, and they're stored, prepared, and served with due attention.

There's no need, by the way, to ask for mustard, pickles, or olives — they don't have any. "We're kind of purists when it comes to that," Patrick says with a slight grin. "I like simple things. I like it when people do one thing and do it well."

For my part, I understand and appreciate that simplicity more and more each time I visit Bin 152. Like a favorite song, Bin 152 is a slow burn.

The Panellas mostly serve the before and after-dinner crowd, along with the late night hospitality folks (they're open until 2 a.m. most nights). Fulton Five, 82 Queen, and Poogan's Porch are relatively close, and with Chef Sean Brock's Husk set to open around the corner, the traffic is sure to increase. "It's going to be great for us," says Patrick. He says they may have interesting ways to cooperate with Brock down the line.

As you go through the menu at Bin 152, you'll notice you can even buy the chair you're sitting in and the table your elbows are resting on. The last page (after the wine, cheese, and charcuterie "bins") is the "antique bin," which has the bar's furnishings listed for sale like so many slices of meat. But for the Panellas, that's kind of an afterthought — a fun twist. Like the Panellas, you'll mostly pay attention to how well the wine or beer, cheese, and charcuterie taste.

About 10 blocks north and three blocks west of Bin 152 and a block away from Ken Vedrinski's Trattoria Lucca is Enoteca, a jewel of a corner bar carefully designed with reclaimed wood, vintage leather, and posh furniture. By design, it's a ripe spot to wait for a table at Lucca — or to pop by for any reason on any other night, before, after, or instead of dinner for a drink or two with friends and some really good Italian cheese, often paired with something tart, tangy, or citrusy to complement it.

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True to Vedrinski's love of Italy, all of Enoteca's wines, beers, and cheeses are Italian. "Sometimes people come in and ask for a Budweiser," says Vedrinski. "I just have to politely tell them that I have no problem at all with Budweiser — in fact, we have it at

Lucca — but that's just not what we do here."

Fair enough. And anyway, as long as you're in Vedrinski's hands why not try a beer you might end up loving but have trouble finding elsewhere — a Moretti Rosso, say, or a Menabrea, Nuovo Mattina, or Cassissona?

Along with better-known wine varietals, Enoteca's menu features difficult-to-find Italian grapes like Sagrantino, planted only in 250 Umbrian hectares and Arneis from the Piedmont. Bottles are priced from \$32 to \$150, and glasses (about 12 at last check) from \$7 to \$14. The wines are an ideal accompaniment to Vedrinski's cheese and charcuterie dishes — dishes that are more composed than Bin 152's. There's a Toma Bielese, a Tuscan sheep's milk cheese paired alongside a Marsala Vidalia Onion Fonduta; a farmy Barolo di Testun (cow's milk from Piedmont) paired with a complex and bold mushroom agrodolce made with hazelnuts; and an assertive gorgonzola creamaficia matched with an orange pepperoncini marmalatta, among others. All are served with crisply toasted and thin slices of bread, and all are damn good.

Enoteca is a labor of love for Vedrinski, but it also has a convenient synergy with Lucca one block over. It's a place for people to relax while waiting on a table, since space, and sometimes quiet (as Vedrinski readily admits) are limited at Lucca. Beyond the food and drink offerings, Enoteca's décor is beautiful: lush, vintage-feeling blue, green, and gray colors, reclaimed and unfinished pine and rich stone. You may not want to get up once you settle in (even for Lucca). But if not tonight, then definitely another. Once you've tasted what either Lucca or Enoteca has to offer, you'll want to hit the other soon.

Tags: wine bar, Bin 152, Enoteca

Location

Bin 152
152 King St.
DOWNTOWN

(based on 1 user review)
Eliotborough Mini Bar
18 Percy St
DOWNTOWN

(based on 1 user review)

The logo for miami.com, featuring the word "miami" in a lowercase, sans-serif font with a wave-like underline, followed by ".com" in a smaller font.

Published on *miami.com* (<http://www.miami.com>)

[Home](#) > Zero Stars for Picnic

Zero Stars for Picnic

By *vnahmad*

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Only thing missing from zero-star Picnic is the red ants...

It isn't every day that I come across a restaurant as bungling as South Beach's Picnic, which bills itself as a "New York Style Diner -- offering American greasy spoon food in a not so greasy spoon setting with a little bit of polish on it." Huh? Despite a shaky concept that includes breakfast for dinner, I'd thought a dozen times about stopping on my way to the Publix nearby, but saved Picnic for the whole family. Who better, I thought, to help me sample sliders, corn dogs, French toast, pancakes, omelets and cupcakes? All I can say is, "Sorry, kids."

Despite the surround-sound shrieks, we managed to hear our quirky waitress, who called us "hon" and "love" as if she had stayed up nights studying reruns of Alice. But this is no Mel's Diner. The menu is more deep South than Big Apple, with items like biscuits and gravy, chicken-fried steak, deviled eggs and deep-fried Oreos, but the place also wants to be a nightclub. On weekends you can get bottle service with Russian Standard vodka and Red Bull for \$100. We were there on a Sunday night, which I later learned was "feed your family night" with \$7 combos for kids. No one told us, so we ended up spending nearly 90 bucks on a dinner for four that required me to go home and cook. About the only thing that could have made this Picnic worse is red ants.

Ambience: The former Sea Rock has an odd, do-it-yourself decor with white vinyl booths, Astroturf walls and black ceilings jacked with monster speakers and projectors used to blast movies so loud you've got to shout to be heard. The night we dined it was Lord of the Rings, which had my 7-year-old crouching behind me to block the beheadings, stranglings and torture scenes.

What Almost Worked

- A pricey (\$10) trio of fluffy pancakes served with supersweet, maple-flavored goop and a choice of gloppy fruit
- A decent trio of sliders that was at least hot and not desperately overcooked

What Didn't Work

- A turkey club sandwich griddled until black and accented with flaccid bits of lettuce
- The macaroni and cheese "spring roll" - a flabby, pale yellow tube that's unappetizing even to look at, served with a milky Gouda dipping sauce
- French fries as limp as pasta
- Mini corn dogs with a thin honey mustard dipping sauce
- An egg sandwich served on a doughy English muffin griddled on one side only with a "sunny-side up" egg with a solid yolk and blackened edges
- Apple pie that arrived on a greasy pastry disk so chewy it required a knife to cut
- A peanut butter and jelly cupcake topped with a fridge-weary tower of frosting as rock-hard as the cake itself
- Wines by the glass that include boxed Inglenook
A Blue Moon served with a white-edged orange slice that looked left over from the night before



The Big Review

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Radegast Hall & Biergarten



Hofbrau Bierhaus Is a Real Brew-haha

Noisy-ass beer garden blasts into Midtown from Munich

By Robert Sietsema

published: April 27, 2011

Mark Hewko



Relief pitchers.

Details:

Hofbräu Bierhaus

712 Third Avenue

212-867-2337, bierhausnyc.com

Slideshow: [Inside Hofbräu Bierhaus: Noisy-Ass Beer Garden](#)

Hofbräu Bierhaus had been open for three weeks when some friends and I decided to drop by for dinner and a few brews around 6:30 on a rainy Tuesday evening. The scene was already tumultuous: every cranny crammed with guys in a complete state of dishabille—ties flung over shoulders, elbows resting in puddles of beer, giving wild-eyed looks as they leaped up to offer toasts. Unable to make myself heard above the din, I whipped out my decibel meter—a phone app perhaps not perfectly calibrated. To my astonishment, the device caromed between 135 and 145 dBs (130 is often referred to as the "threshold of pain"). No matter how much you like the suds or the food at the Bierhäus, you'll never be able to get away from that unearthly noise, which is like being strapped to a stack of Marshalls.

Munich's Hofbräu—the state-owned brewery founded by the Duke of Bavaria in 1589—has established a New York outpost just east of Grand Central Station. The company was a pioneer in using unadulterated local and natural ingredients in brewing, and its famous, 33,000-square-foot beer garden

was frequented over the centuries by the likes of Mozart, Ibsen, Lenin, and Hitler—who held Nazi Party rallies there. Somewhat more recently, Hofbräu has franchised drinking and eating establishments in Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami, Pittsburgh, and Milwaukee, making our own place appear an American afterthought.

The beer hall occupies the sky-lit upper floor of a two-story building, outfitted with long communal tables, blue-and-white Bavarian pennants, a 50-foot balcony overlooking Third Avenue, and baroque woodwork that might remind you of the witch's cottage in *Hansel und Gretel*. A bar at one end offers five beers from a shifting roster of Hofbräu products—currently lager, dunkel ("dark") lager, hefeweizen, dunkelweizen, and bock—made according to centuries-old recipes. The bock, at least, is damn good. Once we managed to wedge our party onto the crowded benches, our waitress approached wearing a dirndl and ruffled blouse. Her massive eye-level cleavage as she bent over to shout caused my guests to squirm. "You can't look away," a female friend from Florida complained.

The menu she handed us was extensive. While the beers seemed expensive at \$8 per half-liter stein,

the food was remarkably cheap given the size of the portions. Unfortunately, much of it was awful, with a frozen-and-reheated taste that explained how the menu manages to be so ambitious. Sausages seemed like the best choice, and we made a beeline for those. The wurst sampler (\$24) featured a bratwurst, bauernwurst (mustard-laced beef-pork blend), Käsekrainer (garlicky pork studded with cheese), and, odd man out, Cajun andouille, which is the only really spicy thing on the menu. The sides, though voluminous, proved disappointing: two scoops of vinegary German potato salad sans bacon (WTF!), a heap of steamed red cabbage, and a tangle of very, very sour sauerkraut.

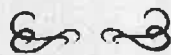
Several other sausages were available, each presented in multiples and occupying its own platter, including a trio of transcendent "wieners" (\$13)—pale pink links that, as the name implies, supposedly originated in Vienna. They put Nathan's to shame. But once again, the sides ended up getting left on the plate. Other things we didn't hate included a giant homemade pretzel (\$9) offered with sweet or spicy mustard, and a charcuterie platter flaunting several types of ham and salami, so neatly rolled up we thought of barging into the kitchen and asking the prep cook to make a fatty for us. Another comparative triumph was the jaegerschnitzel à la Holstein (\$21)—a pair of breaded pork cutlets topped with bacon and a runny fried egg.

But the litany of culinary failures was even more extensive: fried sauerkraut balls that succeeded in being mainly starchy; a sauerbraten platter holding dry pucks of beef, with none of the tartness implied by the name; a sautéed vegetable mélange tasting of dodgy fat and dried oregano; and a flavorless cucumber salad so damp it should have been wrung out like a mop prior to serving. The desserts, however, were exceptional. We liked the apple strudel (\$8) served with ice cream. Warm and flaky, it had never seen the inside of a microwave. The Bavarian cream—a round, pleasant cream puff—was also top-notch. As we polished it off and turned to revisit our mugs of beer, a pal grouched, "These desserts are about the last thing you'd want to wash down with bock."

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