

MARIANI'S VIRTUAL GOURMET NEWSLETTER

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THIS WEEK: Two New Dining Rooms in Big D

DALLAS DINING

by **John Mariani**

Dallas' HOTEL ST. GERMAIN 2516 Maple Avenue; 214-871-2516) is a unique property in Dallas; indeed, it is close to being unique in the United states, for few small hotels are run with the extraordinary personal touch of an owner like the beautiful Claire Heymann, whose attention to detail is evident in every inch of this charming, eight-year old renovation of a 1906 Dallas private home. Heymann, who hails from Louisiana and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, brings the property an antiques dealer's eye, a flair for the romantic, and a woman's touch to every fabric, mirror, piece of art and bathroom amenity. When you return at night, you'll find your enormous antique bed strewn with rose petals. Service is impeccable, and Ms. Heymann herself is one of the most erudite, stylish and genteel hostesses you'll hope to find in Texas.

All that would seemingly be enough for a relaxed, insulated stay--the hotel has been a respite for Prince Albert of Monaco, Oscar de la Renta, Jeff Bridges, Martha Stewart and many other celebs--but this is also one of the most sophisticated venues for fine dining in Dallas.

The dining room itself is small, intimate and can be made up for ten people or thirty. It is full of antiques (the only distressing off note is the faux-antique distressed woodwork), lace and candlelight. The silverware is hefty, the wine glasses Waterford or Schotts-Zwiesel, the china 75-year-old Limoges. The seven-course dinner is fixed priced at \$85 per person (without wine, tax or tip).

A recent meal began with Champagne in the elegant, adjacent drawing room, then we retired to the dining room for amuse bouche that included apple, Boursin and watercress crostini and goat's cheese and chervil feuilleté. The soups that followed were a lovely, light cauliflower scented and colored with saffron and a chive essence, and a deep-flavored roasted vegetable soup with a Texas-inflected red pepper essence.

The first appetizer was a napoleon of portobello mushrooms and zucchini with pistachios, and the other was caramelized endive that had that wonderful bittersweet flavor, paired with a potato lorette.

Seafood followed, with marinated crayfish salad and yellow pepper coulis, and a jumbo crab and corn blini with black truffle. Quite obviously no one is skimping on expensive ingredients here,

which makes the \$85 price tag wholly reasonable.

The meat entrees were maple-glazed antelope chop with sweet potato, black walnuts and Sherry--very much an expression of the Texas culinary movement--and herb-crusted filet of beef tenderloin on a couch of chanterelles and potato with a classic sauce Hussarde.

We also had a chance to try paupiette of Dover sole with haricots vert and spinach ragout and a basil-pignoli vinaigrette and a superbly juicy tangerine-scented breast of pheasant with braised red cabbage and a port wine reduction, decided swing to the classic.

For dessert there was a lush pear and fig tart with minted creme fraiche, and chocolate espresso flan with burnt orange tuile.