



## Dallas Morning News

### *Hotel St. Germain*

2516 Maple Ave. Dallas, TX 75201 Phone: 214-871-2516

By **KIM HARWELL** / Dining Writer

**MANY HAPPY RETURNS:** For a centenarian, the Hotel St. Germain is looking pretty good. It was 100 years ago that the stately Maple Avenue house was built as a private residence by John Patrick Murphy on what was originally called "Millionaires' Row." Mr. Murphy's descendants occupied the home through the 1960s; for the next two decades the Queen Anne-style mansion was used as an art gallery, a computer school and a bar called the Haunted House, among other things. Claire Heymann bought the property in 1989 and opened it as a seven-room boutique bed-and-breakfast in November 1991.

**PLAN AHEAD:** There's nothing spontaneous about a meal in the hotel's luxe dining room. In addition to your name and phone number, be prepared to provide a credit card number to secure your reservation. The \$85 fixed-price menu comprises eight courses, including an *amuse-bouche* to start and an assortment of *mignardises* (small cookies or sweets) to end the meal. Diners need only choose from among a handful of entree selections, though the decision must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

**MASTERPIECE THEATER:** The hotel is a study in Old World elegance, filled with beautiful turn-of-the-century French antiques. The sumptuous dining room is set with crystal stemware, antique silverware and exquisite Limoges china. Waiters wear white gloves and deliver entrees covered with opulent silver domes that are removed with a flourish. At each table awaits a personal note from Ms. Heymann, tucked inside an ivory envelope fastened with a wax seal. This is definitely special-occasion dining: Gentlemen are required to wear jackets and ties, and voices are generally kept to a whisper.

**SPIN THE BOTTLE:** The wine list offers a nice range of selections from France and California in a variety of price points. A modest \$60 bottle of French pinot noir paired well with most of our dishes, and we were surprised not to find a larger selection of these versatile reds from Burgundy. Even better to accompany a meal of this depth would be glasses paired with each course, as offered with so many other *prix fixe* tasting menus.

**CLASSIC CUISINE:** The food is as timeless as the setting, though chef Chad Martin does an admirable job of keeping the menu from feeling dated. A soup of roasted winter squash purée with beans and chard was a smooth, velvety warmer. Seared foie gras was served atop a bed of tiny lentils, the lush goose liver a perfect specimen of rich, silky decadence.

The seafood course lightened things up a little. A petite slab of grilled tuna was served with a tangy roasted pepper tapenade and lime aioli. Though full of intriguing taste and texture combinations, this dish was our least favorite of the evening, mostly due to the somewhat dull flavor of the fish.

Spinach-wrapped veal medallions were a wonder of tender, juicy meat served with a creamy polenta laced with assertive notes of rosemary and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. A rich Mornay sauce and glazed root vegetables completed the plate.

The boneless rack of lamb entree wasn't quite as impressive. Its thin slices of meat were moist and lean and the sophisticated mustard-tarragon *jus* delicious. But accompanying celery root gratin was instead a stolid stack of creamy potato slices with no noticeable hint of celeriac (the knobby vegetable also known as celery root). Also absent were the promised fried shallots.

**HAPPY ENDINGS:** Smooth, creamy Camembert preceded dessert, and the lovely French cow's-milk cheese would have made a capable meal-ender on its own. That said, we still made quick work of the luscious chocolate

soufflé cake, a warm cocoa-rich cylinder accented with a port-marinated fig and a subtle vanilla sauce. A tray of house-made sweets included plump, airy chocolate sandwich cookies; creamy pralines; and sweet, chewy caramels wrapped in bright copper foils. Several of these little treasures left the premises tucked carefully into a pocket, our attempt to bring home a little taste of the good life.

Food - ★★★★★

Service - ★★★★★

Atmosphere - ★★★★★

Published in The Dallas Morning News: 11.24.06