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- Books
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- Comedy
- Dance
- Film
- Games
- Gay
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- Music
- Opera & Classical
- Restaurants & Bars**
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- Shopping
- Spas & Gyms
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- Theater
- Travel
- TV & DVD

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Restaurants & Bars

Time Out New York / Issue 556 : May 25–31, 2006

Review

Remote axis

The owners of Dumont have opened Dressler, a swank new brasserie across the street from Peter Luger in Williamsburg.

By Randall Lane

As any New York meat lover knows, a visit to Peter Luger can feel like some kind of *Mad Max* sequel, in which you have to brave rough terrain to find the much-coveted, limited natural resource—in this case, great steak. Yes, the J, M and Z lines stop at Marcy Avenue, but it's a bit of a hike even for many Williamsburg residents. Now the area is coming back after decades of industrial blight and I was particularly interested to hear that a new restaurant, Dressler, would be opening across the street from Luger. I also wondered: Who has the balls to do it?

Co-owner Colin Devlin and chefs Polo Dobkin and Cal Elliott—the team behind popular Dumont and Dumont Burger—recognized that they could launch a fancier spot in a neighborhood that already has a culinary landmark. Both chefs are Gramercy Tavern veterans, so they know something about fine dining. Wisely, they didn't open a steakhouse, but rather a brasserie-like space that tips its hat to the 'hood with artsy industrial twists, such as Deco-style cut-aluminum light boxes and stunning gothic chandeliers by Brooklyn's Jeff Kahn and Robert Ferraroni.

The short menu bridges two worlds too; this is a brasserie with creative American flourishes. The emphasis is on seasonal ingredients. Frankly, everything sounds good. But the star behind the fish-and-veggie-heavy appetizers has to be the produce purveyor. The chilled spring pea soup with lobster meat topping has a powerhouse broth that packs more flavor than any pea has the right to possess. And the crispy artichoke-and-white-bean salad juxtaposes all kinds of flavors, textures and temperatures: It's alternately crunchy, tender, hot and cold. The only item to let me down was the mushy, rubbery dinner roll.

Nearly every entrée is cooked in a healthy manner—no frying. The seared sea bass is expertly paired with a cream sauce containing a classic cockles-bacon-leek combination. The roasted duck breast comes with sweet, braised duck leg and spicy duck sausage—an onslaught that made each bite exciting. And a sweet, grilled center cut of pork is served with nice, salty, thick-cut bacon strips.

This does not mean they lack a fryer or the knowledge to use one: Their onion rings were the thickest, doughiest, tastiest I've ever had. It's as if each piece of onion has been dressed up to look like a glazed Krispy Kreme doughnut.

The desserts borrow from the classics, and more often than not go one step in a new direction. Instead of key lime pie, Dressler offers key lime crème brûlée (which had a vaguely floral finish). And instead of standard cheesecake, the menu proffers a dense milk-



Photo: Talia Simhi

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Published on 6/16/08

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chocolate version with fresh raspberries and chocolate sauce. I was also happy to see them pushing creative bourbon and rum cocktails, as well as interesting beers like Stone's Smoked Porter on tap.

Sure, the location is still remote for some people, but it's worth a trip—and I haven't even discussed the fact that the prices are about 30 percent cheaper than those in Manhattan: All of this makes the Mad Max in me not so mad anymore.

Dressler, 149 Broadway between Bedford and Driggs Aves, Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-384-6343). Subway: J, M, Z to Marcy Ave. Mon–Thu 6–11pm; Fri, Sat 6pm–midnight, Sun 5:30–10:30pm. Average main course: \$20.

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