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TABLES FOR TWO

DRESSLER

149 Broadway, between Bedford and Driggs Aves., Brooklyn (718-384-6343)

by Nick Paumgarten

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149 Broadway, between Bedford and Driggs Aves., Brooklyn (718-384-6343)—Colin Devlin, the owner of Williamsburg’s beloved DuMont, named his latest venture after Steven Millhauser’s 1996 novel, “Martin Dressler,” about an up-from-nothing hotelier in turn-of-the-century Manhattan. The choice seems only partly propitious. Martin Dressler rises in the world and is fortunate to be able to satisfy “his heart’s desire,” but, as Millhauser writes, “this is a perilous privilege, which the gods watch jealously, waiting for the flaw, the little flaw, that brings everything to ruin, in the end.” Is there a little flaw here? Some Williamsburgers have complained that Dressler is too fancy or too expensive for the neighborhood—strange, if you consider that Peter Luger is across the street. There was also a report that the Dressler rib eye was in fact a strip and that a sevice came out cooked. But nothing so far augurs ruin, except perhaps to Williamsburg’s self-image.

Dressler is a fine-looking place. Something about the glittering light, the wrought-steel chandeliers, the ornate grillwork, and the sprawling zinc bar contributes to an anachronistic air of haut-boho refinement that one may associate with the beginning of the end in certain now-overrun Manhattan neighborhoods. The chefs, Polo Dobkin and Cal Elliott, who come from the Gramercy Tavern, serve up an array of stalwarts (cod, striper, short rib) without resorting to gimmickry or bombast. The fare is notionally seasonal American, a collection of mostly familiar appropriations, many with a nod to the South. Nothing is dull or outrageous. On a recent evening, a rich allotment of quail and bacon (from “a guy in Tennessee with a couple of pigs,” the waiter said) came atop a bed of luscious grits. Apparently, and unsurprisingly, everyone who works at the place is addicted to them. The skin on the roast chicken is popular, too. Among the appetizers, smoked sturgeon with potato galette and frisée, a cauliflower soup with sautéed bay scallops subbing for croutons, and pea-and-Fontina raviolini in a buttery Parmesan broth inspired repeated sorties from enemy utensils. Maybe the lamb ragout was too salty. If it’s fatal flaws the gods are after, however, they’ll have to keep jealously watching. (Open daily for dinner, Sundays for brunch. Entrées \$19-\$30.)
