

## RAILYARD ARRIVES RIGHT ON TIME

by John Vollertson

The November issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine includes a nostalgic look at New York's Tribeca restaurant star, The Odeon, which celebrates its 25th birthday this year. Grandfather to the downtown scene in Manhattan, it defined what would become a new way to "hang out" and dine on fabulous food. I worked there as waiter in my youth.

The idea of a restaurant as an alternative to a nightclub or cocktail bar had a long been a trend in Europe, but, stateside, the melding of a great food scene with a great bar scene was an anomaly. The Odeon brought all the elements together with explosive and long-lasting success.

My first impression of Louis Moskow's just-opened Railyard Restaurant & Saloon (989-3300) reminded me of the classic scene The Odeon captured. The setting is different, but the handsome room, with its soaring ceiling and big comfortable banquettes, sets it apart from any other dining destination in our fair city.

The night I was there the beautiful, long, polished-wood bar had already attracted the cocktail set you might expect to see tipping martinis at Swig or The Paramount. They seemed relieved to find a new place to hang now that the Paramount has closed and Swig is changing hands.

In the airy dining room, there was a buzz even though it was the very first night Moskow had opened the doors. It was a semi-select crowd that had been invited to pay half-price to warm up the staff—so, of course, we were more forgiving. But the evening came off without a hitch and more than a few people I ran into commented on how it seemed like the restaurant had already been open for months.

The bar staff, servers, door staff—even Moskow, the high-strung chef/owner—were relaxed, confident and performed admirably. It's comforting to see a staff made up of many familiar faces from some of our favorite local restaurants—a good sign in a new place.

The steakhouse/chophouse menu is gently priced, with a positive something-for-everyone feel that doesn't fall into trying to cover too many bases. My dining companions, a group of three foodie female professionals, slid onto the banquette and seemed immediately at home. We each sampled every dish ordered and were impressed with almost every bite.

Standouts were an especially zesty Caesar Salad (\$4.95), a rich and creamy gratinéed crab, spinach and artichoke dip (\$6.50) served in a nifty cast-iron skillet with crostini, and the surprise hit

of the night—a combination salad plate (\$5.95) comprised of four delicious vegetable salads, each with interesting herbs and spicing.

Main courses fared as well. A sesame Panko bread-crumbed plump tuna steak seared rare (\$16.95) and served with a veggie stir-fry took the prize as best dish of the night, but my thick lamb chops (\$21.95) with perfunctory mint jelly, and a rich and appropriately fatty rib-eye steak with blue cheese and port butter melting on it (\$22.95) were both simple and yummy. In the steakhouse style, the meat dishes require the ordering of sides, and three out of the four of us loved the creamy spinach.

We all agreed a shrimp linguine Fra Diavolo (\$13.95) needed more devil; perhaps extra chile could be served on the side for additional firing to the diner's taste.

Desserts, at \$4.95 each, included the best version of a molten chocolate cake I've ever sampled and perfect rendition of vanilla crème brûlée.

Wine prices inhabit a comfortable range, with whites from \$27 to \$93 a bottle and reds from \$24 to \$145—again, something for everyone. A waiter's recommendation of a Pumari Pinot Noir was a delicious treat at \$6.50 per glass.

Will the Railyard Restaurant and Saloon change the course of dining history as The Odeon did? Hard to say—but they are on the right track!

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