

# { Food & Drink

DECEMBER

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> **BEE T IT** Roasted beet salad with baby arugula, candied walnuts, goat cheese, vanilla truffle oil, and walnut vinaigrette.

## Delicious Departure

**24grille** in the Westin Book Cadillac veers from the expectations of a steakhouse or grill

// By Christopher Cook

**S**teakhouses and grills — or grilles, as the upscale places often prefer — have been a mainstay of American restaurants and dining since at least the early 1900s — outliving other food darlings, whether it's German, Italian, French, Mexican, Thai, or Chinese.

Many are high-end restaurants with big stuff. Big plate. Big portion. Big steak. Big potato. Big check. (One area grill listed a 64-ounce steak, the ultimate heart-stupid size cut, at \$78.) The most exotic thing on steakhouse menus is often surf 'n' turf. The variety consists of what cut do you want and how rare do you want it?

The other identifying feature of the steakhouse is the extensive and expensive wine list that arrives almost horse-drawn heavy and bound in what the actor Ricardo Montalban might have described — as he did in ads for the Chrysler Cordoba — as “soft Corinthian leather.”

Our American love of beef is so pervasive that it extends to our homes, where grilling is a male-dominated sport. (If you want to ruin a friendship, just insult a man's grilling or suggest that his bone-in 32-ouncer is a petite cut.)

Because grilling steak doesn't take a lot of skill, I tend to stay away from writing about grills and steakhouses. The exception is steakhouses and grills that depart from size-matters



portions — and there are a few around Detroit — and into more complicated culinary offerings.

The 24grille in the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel in downtown Detroit is such an exception.

The restaurant, which opened in 2009, is a modern interpretation of some of the old wood-and-leather places whose names often ended with club or chop-house. In this case, 24grille feels somewhat like the famed downtown Caucus Club — in Ray-Bans.

Although 24grille has large windows that face Michigan Avenue, it also has the dark richness of the old clubby places, with tall-backed black-leather banquettes, chairs studded in brass tacks, thick blond-wood tables, and hanging lights gussied up with rectangular acrylic covers that refract light like sun on a diamond bracelet.

A glass divider that separates the bar from the dining room injects modernism. It's made of several panels that resemble smashed windshield glass — a decidedly edgy look. An outdoor terrace with umbrellas on the sidewalk offers additional seating



> **CULINARY FIREWORKS** Top left: Scandinavian Spiced Chicken Breast with apple-bread stuffing and haricots verts. Above right: "Firecracker" Tiger Prawns: Pan-seared tiger prawns on scampi-stuffed pasta ravioli with shallot-vermouth beurre blanc, pea tendrils, lemon zest, tomato, parsley, and garlic.

mustard-yellow napkins, tall stemware, and simple flatware.

Put it all together, and you get an intimacy and richness that's also sleek and inviting, a comfortable combination of opulent and casual.

Pair that ambience with a brief but intelligent and interesting menu and a terrific newly arrived chef from just up the street (Christian Borden, who put Atlas Global Bistro on the map), and you have a restaurant rooted in the grill and steakhouse tradi-

during warm weather.

The table settings are earth toned, with gray-brown reed-like place mats,

tion, but it's a big cut above that. Borden's career has also taken him to the Rattlesnake Club, The Vintage Bistro, and Boocoo. At 24grille, his food is extremely good. Since Borden's arrival, the menu has changed. It shifted across two visits, and will again periodically.

"I want to see things really cool, light, and fresh on the menu," says Borden, who took over the kitchen in September. "When I came here, all the food was a little heavy and monochromatic. So, the first thing I did was lighten the flavors and the sauces."

Borden emphasizes that 24grille is a work in progress, saying, "I don't want to be committed to any one type of thing here."

At dinner, we tried five of the six starters, the



best of which was a wonderfully fresh and sweet tuna tartare that arrived in a fried wonton shell. The tuna was cut into tiny cubes and dressed with pickled shallot and jalapeños, cucumber, and ginger soy. The balance that made it so good was between the heat of the pepper and the coolness of the cucumber. Likewise, two pork tacos — served with pickled chili peppers, a cilantro coulis, and crème fraîche blended with lime juice — were exceptional.



Also very good was the moist, glistening duck confit served with a mascarpone polenta and juices from a roast duck. Also worthwhile is the crab cake that comes with a coulis of red pepper and a jalapeño emulsion. The one disappointment was an overly salty spinach gratin with marinated artichokes, which we all agreed would have been good, but for that error.

The menu also offers five salads, including a classic Caesar, and a superb roasted-beet salad with walnuts on arugula with goat cheese and dressed in vanilla truffle oil and aged balsamic vinegar.

Main courses include four fish selections and six meat dishes, only two of which are beef. We stuck

ravioli dish.

The best by far was the Airline Chicken (not available on our second visit), which Borden gets from a farm in Troy. The chicken was plump and moist, served with dense pan juices and a Parmesan polenta. A close second was the strip steak from a farm in Arkansas, encrusted with Kona coffee and grilled and served with zip sauce and a ragout of five types of mushrooms. Outstanding.

The 24grille is the smaller of the two restau-



**> KITCHEN KING** Top left: Chef Christian Borden, who arrived at 24grille in September, is transforming the menu. Above right: Olde English Boneless Braised Beef with cherry tomatoes, glazed carrots, roasted potatoes, cipollini, and frizzled leeks. Left: Duck confit with mascarpone polenta.

with the dry-land items and tried four: A steak, a veal meatloaf, and chicken, and added a prawn-and-

rants in the Westin Book Cadillac, which has been wonderfully restored. Its main restaurant is Roast, a creation of Cleveland super-chef Michael Symon, which we reviewed last year and also enjoyed.

When you visit for the first time, don't leave without taking a quick tour of the restored areas on the second level and the ballrooms in the 1920s-era hotel. You'll leave wondering why some people don't think downtown Detroit is coming back. ■

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