



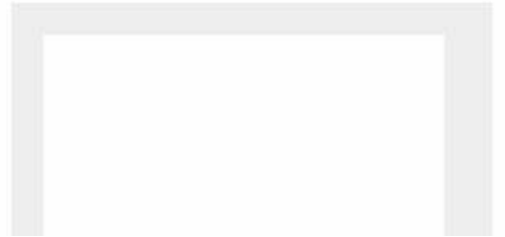
ICI Urban Bistro: Ooo La La, Tres Delicious

By *Alex Barron*

DC Spotlight Restaurant Critic

Thursday, November 3, 2011

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Photos: Mark Taylor/DC Spotlight Newspaper

These days, D.C.'s market for upscale French bistros is completely saturated. One can only imagine that the prospect of competing with the area's big names



Richard, Ripert, Wiedmaier — must be intimidating to say the least. Perhaps an outsider is best equipped with the blinders necessary to tune out the hype that surround this scene. At least, this may have been the thinking behind iCi Urban Bistro's decision to bring in



new executive chef Franck Loquet, who, despite his youth, has already built up an impressive resume with stints in Milwaukee, Chicago and his native Paris.



As he settles into his new post — housed in the prime real estate of the Sofitel across the street from Lafayette Square Park — Loquet's first item of business is to get back to the basics. "I'd prefer to concentrate on a few dishes that we can do really well," says the chef. "I think in the future, you'll see a smaller menu."

In addition, he plans to eschew the decadently creamy dishes favored by the previous chef — a native of Burgundy, a region known for its reliance on butter and cream — in favor of lighter, healthier ingredients. The fresh, organic Pickled Beet Salad (\$15) is a testament to this shift in the kitchen's philosophy. Truffle oil and goat cheese fill little divots on the top of each individual disk of succulent beet.

Fortunately, the Less Cream Policy does not apply to the Chicken Crepes (\$13), Franck's melt-in-your-mouth signature dish. As creamy as the chicken is, the tarragon is the star of the show here; the taste lingers long after the crepe is gone.

For entrees, the Grilled Scallops (\$29) are fresh and lemony — the centerpiece of the new "De-Light Menu" (a three-course dinner of under five hundred calories). Loquet's personal stamp is also apparent in the Braised Beef Cheek "Provencale," (\$29) a tender piece of meat served on a fluffy parmesan polenta. The hospitality here is a great compliment to the surefooted French cooking. Manager Carlos Alcazar sets the tone with a warm "bonsoir," and a personal visit to each table. The rest of the staff follow suit.

The minimalist decor — characterized by unclothed tables, glossy white surfaces and a large table situated behind a gauzy white curtain — may be more suggestive of a club than a bistro, but the service keeps things on the cozy side.

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