



All About Eve

With stunning décor and a chic vibe, Eve is a new Gold Coast fave

| By Michael Nagrant | Photography by Dave Slivinski |

Somewhere, there's a concierge getting fired tonight. At least that's what I imagine will happen after the pinstripe-suited grayhairs sitting near me at Eve get back to their hotel after their meal. Even a desk clerk at the Red Roof Inn should have known that this old-boy cabal, fresh off what was undoubtedly an oil drill parts supply show, would be more comfortable seated three blocks north at Chicago's quintessential meat market man lounge, Gibsons. Folks who order beef tenderloin "well done," ask for "regular potatoes" and request "none of them newfangled sprouts" (i.e. micro-greens) are definitely not ready for chef Troy Graves' globally tinged, contemporary American fare. The chic décor and forward-thinking food at Eve may be too much for their macho appetites.

On second thought, maybe it's not the concierge's fault that these men seem out of their element in the

sleek, 3,000-square-foot dining room. (Featured in this month's *Elle Décor*, Eve boasts lush draperies, crystal chandeliers shrouded in mod mylar shades, and custom mosaic-tiled walls.) I assume that whoever recommended Eve—located in a shadowy, relatively Gothamesque nook of the Gold Coast—surely knew that Graves, at his Lincoln Square spot Tallulah, has developed a terrific reputation for making gourmet eats accessible. At Eve, however, he's gone the opposite route, with several plates that read like he's cooking from an eclectic basket of luxury ingredients. It may be too much for our neighbors, but for adventurous eaters like my dining companion—a food lover and burgeoning Internet impresario—and myself, the flavor combinations are nothing short of intriguing.

Among the most innovative on the dinner menu: pheasant breast with a Medjool date CONTINUED...

EVE

RATING: ★★

840 N. Wabash Ave.,
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What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

WHAT TO WEAR: Based on the dress jackets, J. Crew and jeans in the dining room, Eve's "smart casual" dress code does not mean pocket protector-laden button-downs.

WHAT TO ORDER: Abalone, mushroom and spinach pierogi, harissa-glazed pork belly, bread pudding topped with bourbon ice cream.

WHEN TO GO: Sleepy weeknights.

WHAT TO KNOW: Though they sound enticing, skip the cocktails in favor of the extensive offering of wines by the glass.

WHO GOES: Gold Coast natives, the glitterati and Meritage's old fan base.

WHAT IT COSTS: Appetizers \$8-16; entrées \$18-31; desserts \$8-10.

HIDDEN BEAUTY Clockwise from top left: Custom mosaic-tiled walls in Eve's dining room; crystal chandeliers; seared duck breast and leg confit with a rutabaga purée and five-spice quince; another chandelier. Below: Pan-seared scallops with Taleggio and pear risotto and crispy pancetta.



...CONTINUED crépinette and pork belly glazed in harissa. The lunch menu is also compelling, with dishes like wild boar ribs in plum sauce and a foie gras-topped burger. In fact, the sheer amount of foie gras, black truffle, sweetbreads, short ribs and lobster offered makes Eve read like a foodie's dream, the menu equivalent of *The Eagles: Their Greatest Hits 1971-1975*.

Hoping to warm up on this chilly weekday evening (our feet are freezing and the space heater plugged into the wall definitely isn't helping), we bypass Eve's wine list—which features one of the strongest and broadest “by the glass” offerings around, comprising 18 wines instead of the eight or so options found at comparable restaurants—in favor of cocktails. This turns out to be a mistake. My aptly named Fall From Grace, featuring Hendricks gin, grilled blood orange, rosemary and flat soda, tastes like soapy cucumber. The sprig of rosemary the bartender smugly plops into my glass has crispier, more blackened needles than an unfed Christmas tree in late January. I fish it out and put it on a napkin.

I'm not playing roulette, so I go to the wine list for round two. I'm rewarded with a fruity, high-acid, food-friendly 2006 Röss Hattenheimer Schützenhaus Riesling. (Other standouts on the menu include a 2007 Paul Hobbs El Felino Malbec and a Merry Edwards 2007 Sauvignon Blanc.) The wine pairs well with what turns out to be one of my favorite dishes in months—abalone, mushroom and spinach-stuffed pierogi. I run a greedy fork through the pierogi, which is swimming in gorgonzola cream. The earthiness of the mushroom melds with the back-end brininess of the abalone and the sweetness of the gorgonzola sauce. This is followed by a succulent, smoky grilled lobster sausage that tastes like sea-kissed pork perched near a river of maple béchamel and a small, sweet mountain of applewood bacon and caramelized pearl onion.

My friend happily digs into a bowl of the harissa-glazed pork belly, which is tossed with supermodel-thin French string beans, olive tapenade and golden raisins. Despite a small mishap—after a few bites, he suddenly grimaces and spits out some tough, undercooked artichoke leaves—these three dishes, perfectly balanced and innovative without going overboard, are as good as any plates you'd find at a stalwart Chicago favorite like

“Perfectly balanced and innovative without going overboard, these three dishes are as good as any plates you'd find at a stalwart Chicago favorite like Blackbird.”

Blackbird. For dessert, a scoop of bourbon-infused ice cream over an uncharacteristically silky bread pudding is simply (and almost literally) icing on the cake.

By all accounts, the Gold Coast, with its discerning, moneyed clientele, should have the best restaurants in the city—and, even with a few faults, Eve is one of the better spots in the 'hood. Yes, its lofty ambitions are punctuated with a few unnecessary misses. But brighter—almost as bright as its glittering chandeliers—are the spectacular culinary hits. Once Graves focuses and simplifies those last few dishes, Eve will be so good that even a misguided concierge's recommendation might turn out all right. ■



From top: Seared foie gras; Eve's bar is a cozy spot to grab wines by the glass.

