

## eat &amp; drink



Indonesian fried rice  
KAITLYN MCQUAID PHOTOS FOR REDEYE

# Culture clash

## De Quay's Dutch-Indonesian fare is destination-worthy

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

**T**he phrase “neighborhood restaurant” has become something of a pejorative in these times of multimillion-dollar restaurant build-outs, innovative pop-ups and clubby small-plates spots. The connotation is that it’s at best classic and unfussy and at worst cheap, unrefined and just uninteresting enough that it could never be a destination. And there are plenty of those kinds of neighborhood restaurants in Chicago. But what I’ve also found is that the restaurants that I really adore—where something unique and exciting is going on, where they’re forwarding a new vision of dining and also doing it in a personalized way that satisfies the individual diner—are also often identified as neighborhood restaurants. De Quay, a new Dutch-Indonesian spot in Lakeview, identifies as such. I stopped in to find out if it would be the kind of mediocre ‘hood spot that repels or the killer kind that thrills.

### The host with the most

The outside of de Quay resembles something out of a Sherlock Holmes novel, with black metal lanterns that look like antique gaslights glowing across the facade. Chocolate-colored tables and chairs are bathed in flickering LED tealights; one on my table, however, had gone dim. As he took our drink order, wine director and general manager Terry McNeese—a veteran of Bistro 110, Le Lan and Henri—noticed and deftly swapped in a new working light as he delivered a coupe of delightful, dry, strawberry-nosed sparkling Alsatian pinot noir from Domaine Camille

Brown (\$11 a glass). McNeese sussed out that I like Alsatian wines and poured a couple of rieslings as samples for my date and me while we waited for our appetizers. He did the same thing with a beer he’s excited about for the table of ladies across the way. Because of McNeese, de Quay feels like a cocktail party thrown by a discerning friend.

### Meet chef David de Quay

McNeese’s culinary partner in crime, and the restaurant’s namesake, is chef/owner David de Quay. De Quay is not a familiar name in Chicago, but he’s no newbie chef. He began

cooking at age 5, inspired by his Dutch grandmother, who whipped up incredible things from her personal vegetable garden. “Cooking chose me. It was in my blood,” de Quay said. “People in my family would say, ‘David’s gonna be a chef when he grows up,’ and I’d beam with pride.” De Quay graduated from hotel and hospitality management school at Michigan State University in 1983 and worked a series of jobs, including a stint at The Greenbrier, a resort in West Virginia that he said had incredible European-style training. When a restaurant deal fell through, he studied at The French Pastry School in Chicago in 2013. He most recently ran the kitchen at the Hinsdale Golf Club. I wouldn’t consider such a gig auspicious, but then again, Curtis Duffy of Grace got his start at a country club in Columbus, Ohio.

If it wasn’t the discipline of running the country club kitchen that contributed to de Quay’s tremendous debut, I suspect it was his thoughtfulness. De Quay didn’t want to open a place just to open one; he wanted to contribute something to Chicago that didn’t exist. “Chicago is a wonderful culinary community that spans amazing ethnic spots to five-star dining. I knew if I was going to open

a place, it had to be something unique, something we didn’t have, that contributed to the conversation,” de Quay said. “My father was Dutch and he was in the Dutch Navy. He’d travel to Indonesia and bring back these incredible spices. Our family would cook these rijsttafel dishes,” which are a traditional Dutch family-style meal, de Quay said. “I grew up with that and thought it was something interesting I could bring to the city.”

### The Dutch touch

And that is exactly what he’s done. Except for some excellent Indonesian street food from Rickshaw Republic up the street, I have little frame of comparison for what de Quay is cooking. What I do know is de Quay’s food is fully formed, perfectly seasoned and eminently comforting. Black pepper-gouda dumplings (\$9), crispy wonton wrappers stuffed with velvety gouda cheese-larded mashed potato, firm English peas and salty bits of smoky bacon, are like a cross between shepherd’s pie and crab rangoon. The bright mustard dipping sauce and tiny slivers of chili smartly cut through the richness of the dumpling. I’m also smitten with de Quay’s nasi goreng (\$13), a fiery Indonesian fried rice

**RATINGS KEY** ★★★★★ DEAD UPON ARRIVAL ★★★★★ PROCEED WITH CAUTION ★★★★★ GIVE IT SOME TIME  
 ★★★★★ TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT ★★★★★ OFF TO A GOOD START ★★★★★ HEATING UP ★★★★★ ALREADY HOT



**Duck leg and breast**

studded with tender florets of cauliflower kicked up with Holland hot finger chilis and sambal, rusty-colored tangy tamarind sauce, a mix of crushed coconut and peanuts, and house-pickled cucumbers, you can doctor the rice to your taste in the same interactive way you do with a bowl of pho. The final dish, no matter how you garnish it, has the carby comfort of Chinese fried rice.

This being a Dutch-inspired restaurant, there are, of course, frites (\$7). They are mahogany-hued, universally crispy and incredibly light. They're served with glossy, gooey peanut sauce and dill-flecked mayo, and I pretty much licked both of the condiment holders clean once I ran out of frites.

De Quay's buttermilk-marinated chicken thigh (\$18) perched on a mountain of basmati rice surrounded by a moat of sunshine-yellow curry bursting with lemongrass and lime notes is a lesson for Thai takeout joints. Instead of serving up mushy tofu and tasteless cubes of pedestrian chicken or beef, they could kick up their presentation and flavors with a beautiful juicy chicken thigh like the one served at de Quay.

While I loved the curry, the poultry champion of the night was a tamarind- and soy-glazed duck breast and leg (\$25). The sauce was thick like molasses—salty, sweet and tangy, a delightful lacquer for the tender rare breast meat on the plate. The duck's garnish of Asian pear, caramelized fennel tossed in an almost foie gras-like duck jus and gingerbread-like croutons called ginger koek would be a killer standalone salad even if it wasn't served with the duck.

**Savory and sweet skills**

De Quay deploys his French pastry training well, serving desserts such as a hot homemade stroopwafel (\$8) dripping with caramel, and a massive macaron (\$8) called a rocher topped with Dutch chocolate cream so deca-

dent that were you trying to achieve death by chocolate, this would be the delightful murder weapon. Though we ordered the Dutch chocolate rocher and the stroopwafel, my date expressed disappointment that we couldn't also try the almond spekkock (\$8), a cake made of dozens of thin layers of almond paste (think of the wafering in a Kit Kat candy bar, but softer) that are spread painstakingly one layer a time and broiled individually by the de Quay chefs until the cake is built up to a few inches in thickness.

McNeese retorted to her, "Well, now you have a reason to come back next Sunday." But minutes later, he showed up with not only the desserts we ordered but also a slice of spekkock for us to try. It had a cherrylike essence and a pleasant burnt, nutty finish that melded with the toasty hazelnut notes of the housemade pandan leaf ice cream served alongside it. We expressed our delight to McNeese when he inquired what we thought. After we thanked him, he said, "I still expect you to come back next week." Though it is not in our neighborhood, de Quay is one of the most incredible neighborhood restaurants, and because of that, though it may not be next week, or the week after that, we will most definitely return.

**Bottom line**

De Quay is a spectacular—and spectacularly unique—restaurant serving incredible Dutch-Indonesian gourmet comfort food amidst impeccable, personal service in a comforting setting. These qualities make it a destination neighborhood restaurant on par with celebrated spots such as Longman & Eagle, Lula Cafe, Nightwood, and maybe my very favorite of all, Lincoln Park's defunct Kith & Kin.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE. REDEYE@REDEYETCHICAGO.COM | @REDEYEATRINK

**REVIEW**  
**de Quay**  
 2470 N. Lincoln  
 Ave. 872-206-8820  
 ★★★★★  
 Already hot

**ELSTON AVENUE SAUSAGE & MUSIC FEST**

**★ Performances by ★**  
**Heartless Bastards**  
**Andrew Jackson Jihad**  
**Filligar • From Indian Lakes**  
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**Mark Rose • The Kickback**  
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