

# eat & drink

Salted butter caramel macarons  
at Maison Parisienne  
LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE



## worth a trip

Salted butter caramel macaron (\$1.95)

Maison Parisienne 3307 N. Clark St. 773-904-0777

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

I didn't know it, but I've waited all my life for this. And by this, I mean a real French person saying the words "Mountain Dew." First, I want to apologize for America. No one from the land of champagne should even be aware of the neon-green soda.

But when three French-born friends—former interior designer Erwan Le Nan, culinary school-trained pastry chef Styven Charton and Audrey Naccache, a chef who grew up working in her parents' restaurants—chuck it all, leave Paris and open a cafe in Lakeview, well, I guess innocence is lost.

As I ordered lunch at Maison Parisienne,

I asked Le Nan what my drink options were. "Ze Coke, wah-tear and ze Mow-taeyne du," he said. I didn't recognize the last beverage for a moment because I was swept up in his enunciation, the lovely immersion in each consonant, the earnest indulgence in each vowel. This is one of Maison Parisienne's many charms. Another is that three friends left Paris—a city that many of us long to escape to—and built a business from scratch in a foreign country, land of Big Macs and tooth enamel-threatening soda and a city with a (currently) terrible football team and mind-numbing winters.

"I'm a little bit scared about the winters," Le

Nan said. "The good news is I live above the shop, so I don't have to go outside too much."

And while you eat boeuf bourguignon prepared by chefs wearing tall, pleated white paper toques, you will hear other French expats speaking in their native tongue. They do so over madeleines and cafe au laits surrounded by gold and white custom wallpaper bearing the M and P logo of the restaurant. There's also quiche, moist-to-the-core chocolate bread and brioche muffins overflowing with pink pearlescent strawberry jam. The croissants, tiny by American standards, are flaky, buttery and infinitely coiled upon themselves in golden layers. Maison Parisienne conjures an afternoon near Notre-Dame Cathedral, minus the Seine.

The eclairs here are made with custardy pate a choux dough that will make you angry that Dunkin' Donuts represents the art form with dry, sugary, chocolate-coated long johns. Triangles of bourdeleau (not a fancy red wine but

a peach-topped tart) bursting with almond-flavored cream are worth every calorie.

But of all the pastries, the most delightful is a salted butter caramel macaron (incidentally, they spell it "macaroon," which we use to describe the super dense, coconut-stuffed cookies). When I popped one in my mouth, I was rewarded with a shattering crust and almond-scented sugar granules that dissolved blissfully on my tongue. Inside, a decadent caramel filling tasted of freshly churned cream. The salty, sweet morsel satisfied my dessert cravings better than the most devilish chocolate cake.

I don't know if these three friends who took a leap of faith and pimp Mountain Dew with an elegant diction will become an institution, but I hope they do, because I can't imagine a Chicago without such a lovely French pastry.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.