

eat & drink



Figgy Shrooms soda

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE PHOTOS

THE dream TEAM

The culinary stars behind Entente are serving up Michelin-level fare

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

Forrest Gump was wrong. Sometimes life is not like a box of chocolates. You do know what you're going to get. In the restaurant business, this means that people with good track records tend to churn out great work over and over again. The folks behind Lakeview newcomer Entente—owner Ty Fujimura (Small Bar, Ani, Arami), chef partner Brian Fisher (Schwa) and pastry chef Mari Katsumura (Blackbird, Acadia)—are a veritable dream team.

I celebrated a major wedding anniversary at Arami a few years back. Blackbird is the restaurant that inspired me to become a food writer. Schwa is my ideal for punk rock-fueled fine dining. And Acadia served me one of the best meals I've ever had in Chicago. Still, even dream teams fail. There are too many egos and clashing personalities, or, in the case of a restaurant, too many proverbial cooks in the kitchen. Heck, the 2004 U.S. men's Olympic basketball squad loaded with LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony and Dwyane Wade got schooled, only grabbing a bronze medal. I stopped in recently to see if Entente was 2004 Olympic loser LeBron or 2016 Cleveland Cavaliers world champion LeBron.

THE ROOM

At first, Entente was looking like 2004 LeBron. The front room, featuring soft gray-colored walls and sharp modern planters stuffed with succulents and pussy willow branches, was kind of zen. But I didn't sit in that area; I was whisked into a long, narrow room in the back filled with cold exposed brick, unsightly baseboard heaters, glass pendant lamps that looked like they'd been plucked from Home Depot and a fake-looking plant that was backlit so it cast a spooky shadow on the ceiling. Tables were outfitted with generic wooden chairs that looked like they'd been borrowed from a TGI Fridays. The only redeeming quality of the room was that it offered an open view of Fisher and his crew cooking. It felt like a quick, cheap repurposing of the now-defunct Ani and not a thoughtful rebuild of a space.

THE FOOD

Part of the reason I'm so sensitive to the quality of the space is that Fisher and his crew are so talented. Their high-quality fare deserves a temple. Chicken liver (\$13) is now more ubiquitous than pork belly on restaurant menus, but Fisher's liver is pureed to velvet in a Vitamix Vita-Prep blender, leaving it smoother than all other contenders. It's topped with a ring of winy Concord grape jelly and tiny tufts of salty sweet pumpkin seed butter, and it comes with tangy house-baked charred



Wedge salad

sourdough made with rye flour. Dipping the bread into the mousse elicits the same kind of savory-sweet satisfaction you'd get from a childhood peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

For many, iceberg lettuce is considered a tasteless scourge. I urge those people to check out Katsumura's "wedge" (\$13), maybe the G.O.A.T. salad I've ever had. Crisp icy leaves are ringed with thick lardons of salty slab bacon, creamy heart-stopping funky cambozola blue cheese and sweet sun gold tomato jam infused with white plum. The whole thing is dusted with tomato powder, dehydrated tomato full of mouth-delighting umami. Sprigs of dill pop and refresh each bite, and a moat of mayo- and sour cream-based herb-infused green goddess dressing rests in the middle of the lettuce cup. This dressing should be bottled and sold. I licked my plate clean once the salad was gone.

Then there's the Carolina Gold risotto (\$17), featuring buttery Parmesan and funky Australian black truffle-larded heirloom rice rimmed with circles of pureed duck yolk. Each spoonful was as comforting as a glass of Pappy Van Winkle 23-year-old bourbon gulped down while sitting next to a roaring fire. The dish is also a nod to and inspired by Fisher's history, aka Schwa's iconic quail egg ravioli.

The only dish I struggled with was a Japanese-inspired duck (\$24) featuring a fermented miso yogurt crisp, smoked blackberries and turnips. I loved the duck, which was lithe and sliced like sashimi. But the blackberries were leathery and chewy and the yogurt crisp reminded me of an insipid communion wafer.

THE DESSERT

A profiterole (\$13) burst with chocolate and sour cherry and a root beer-like perfume. It's a complex and compelling update of the traditional French-style chocolate-drizzled pastry stuffed with vanilla ice cream.

THE DRINKS

One of the coolest and most unique things about Entente is the house soda program overseen by beverage director Angie Silberberg. Instead of watery sodagun Coke, honey-roasted figs and dried shiitake mushrooms are infused into a simple syrup spiked with tarragon, resulting in the Figgy Shrooms soda (\$8). While I was intrigued, I was also on the fence about ordering it because I was in a drinking mood. My server told me there was a secret "Long Island iced tea" version of the drink if I needed a little boost. I bit. Mixed with bourbon, rye, orange liqueur, white rum and tequila, the drink was boozy but also savory, sweet and lip-smacking.

REVIEW
Entente
 3056 N. Lincoln Ave.
 872-206-8553
 ★★☆☆☆
 Off to a good start

THE SERVICE

The tip-off to the secret cocktail was just one of many fine acts performed by the service staff that night. When I went to the restroom, my napkin was refolded and placed on the table. Water glasses never went lower than half-full. When I finished one drink, the menu appeared so I could order another.

BOTTOM LINE

The food and drink here are Michelin-level quality. Chef Fisher and pastry chef Katsumura are two up-and-coming Chicago chefs to watch. The dining room isn't going to win any design awards, but the meal is so compelling, you'll hardly care.

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

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



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