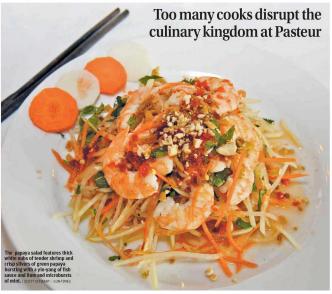
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A MIXED BAG



If you've ever wondered what it like to dine like a dictator or an limperial ruler, then the newly reopened, upscafe French/Veltames Pasteur in Edgewater is probably just the ticket.

That is to say the imperious tent of gir dickolos opulence. The newly remodeled dining room at Pasteur, featuring chocolate-colored highback banquettes, lungs wrought metal globe chandleliers and panelet metal globe chandleliers and panelet. highback banquettes, huge wrought metal globe chundleirs and paneled winnscoting, is a swank respite from hustlers and madness outside on Broadway. The adjoining private white-on-white dining room filled with white leather chairs and a white-on-white something out of a Disney fantawy about a snow queen-chardis is like something out of a Disney fantawy about a snow queen-And though its early spring. Pasteur's rattan dining chairs, growe undulating ceiling fans conjure a undulating ceiling fans conjure a

undulating ceiling fans conjure a

undulating ceiling fans conjure a sweltering Hanoi afternoon. A good dictator also appreciates obeisant quick service. Pasteur sorta has that down. Our watter who frogrest to bring shared plates during certain course and silverware minded and would likely be thrown in a stone dungeon in a particularly experience segment. But the control of the contr cious host. She notices our table's slight wobble and shores it up with another. She stops by to discuss the restaurant's signature Ca Kho To or claypot catfish and the best way to serve it. She also directs us to a incredible ginger tea for our dessert

meredible ginger tea for our desser course.

Like the service, the cuisine salso a little schizophrenic. Pasteur employs a Vietnamese chef, Amy's ex-husband and original Pasteur chef Dan Nguyen, and also a tra-ditional French chef, Eric Aubriot

(formerly Aubriot, Tournesol and a whole host of others). Because of the French colonial rule in Vietnam, indulging in both cuisines is not a stretch. However, at Pasteur, there is no gentle fusion of the two ap-proaches, but rather a very distinct line of confusion.

Aubriot's dishes such as seared duck breast with bacon, pearl onions and zucchini balsamic sauce, onions and zucchini balsamie sauce, or escargot with parsley sauce, are slightly twisted, but fairly classical French bistro/brasserie standards and are starkly different from Nguyen's nuanced, bright and spicy gourmet versions of Vietnamese

lassics. As this is the umpteenth incarnation of Pasteur in the last 20 rears, I suspect the Nguvens felt as though they needed to cater to the more affluent destination diners or Edgewater residents who might be intimidated by Chef Dan's Vietnamese dishes, to

Chef Dan's Vietnamese dishes, to ensure success.
Unfortunately, Aubriot, who was once a very great chef, has become a culinary mercenary, working in restaurants for a few months and then moving on to the next paycheck somewhere else. He doesn't hold up his end at Pasteur. His fishy-smelling sauteed scallops feature mushy tasteless anoles. feature mushy tasteless apples, barely cooked, dusty-hard lentils and a parsimony of balsamic reduction. The seared duck breas reduction. The seared duck brea is a chewy, desiccated mess. His bread pudding is too dense and has almost no custard. His foie gras, featuring a red grape port reduction that tastes like a foie reduction that tastes like a foie fat-infused berry pie, is incredible but up against Chef Nyugen's star anise-perfumed pho and curried beef, it's also ridiculously out of context (as if Chipotle started shouldn't try to be all things to all

Chef Nguyen's food, when it's on, still proves to be some of the best Vietnamese around. The aforemen Vietnamese around. The aforemen-tioned Pho Bo features a sliky deep broth on par with my favorite at Pho 888 on Argyle. The well-trimmed, tender bits of rare eye-of-round and brisket are the highest quality (ie. not rimmed with fat and chewy connective tissue) slices of beef I've





LEFT: The Pho Bo is one of the best in Chicago. ned, tender bits of rare eye-of-round and

BELOW: The delicious foie gras boasts a red grape port reduction. | SCOTT STEWART-SUN-TIME:

ABOVE: For dessert, try the the Vietnamese

n tea ice cream drizzled

ever had in a local bowl of Pho. And priced at \$5 for a huge bowl, it's totally in line with what's served at the more informal storefronts. His papaya salad features thick white nubs of tender shrimp and white nubs of tender shrimp and crips alivers of green papaya bursting with a yin-yang of fish sauce and lime and microbursts of mint. It's easily the second-best papaya said I've had in Chicago after Next Restaurant's version during their temporary Thin menu. Nguyen's Bo Xao Lan, or tender shards of curry beef sauteed with mashroom curry beef sauteed with mashroom was of kaffie lime. Even when Reyupen's execution is less than stellar, the flavors are incredible. His sauteed clay pot caffish reredible. His sauteed clay pot caffish

credible. His sauteed clay pot catfish is flaky and spicy. My only issue is that the very excellent deep caramel glaze pools at the very bottom of the pot and is tough to fish out. Glazing the fillets themselves might be a

the fillest threated on might be a better approach. Thick smoky grilled Japanese eggplant dotted with a confett of shrimp, scallion, sweet pepper and lime sauce is like the setsichying the scale with the setsichying con-curritoreds ruddy steale. Unfortu-mately, some of the eggplant is raw in the middle. But those are minor quibbles. I assumed I'd have a major one with Pesteur's deep freid bunnans with Pesteur's deep freid bunnans with Steal Conference on the con-traction of the contraction of the con-strawberry and chocolate sauce. I expected the green test see even to

expected the green tea ice cream to be tannic and bitter and overpower be tanne and bitter and overpower the dish, but instead, the ice cream was slightly herbal, and incredibly smooth and sweet. It is the Viet-namese answer, and a much better one I might add, to the American banana split. mana split. Ultimately, the big problem at

Pasteur is that there are too many cooks in the kitchen. The Nguyens would be wise to take a page out of the dictatorial playbook and send Aubriot and the whole incongruous middling. French bistro fare packing. If they do that, I expect they will

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