

# COOKING, EATING and DRINKING IN NYC

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2011

## Bouley

The night I dined at Bouley the entryway was filled with shelves and shelves of macintosh apples, which put off an aroma reminiscent of a spa. What a comforting and welcoming entrance! The small lounge before the main dining room looks more like a fancy living room in a Newport mansion, with funny old-style french lounge chairs, than the entryway to one of New York's finest restaurants. I was early so I ordered a glass of \$20 pinot noir. A definite strike against them was that it took almost a minute for each dollar that glass cost to finally bring it to me, which was all the more absurd because I was the only person in the lounge and there were about 10 servers walking around aimlessly. Gladly, this proved to be the only service hiccup in the entire evening.

The dining room is beautiful and definitely evokes the intended feeling of being in an opulent estate in the French countryside. The room has two separate areas. The front area is bright with vaulted ceilings and tables spaced generously away from one another. The back dining area is much more intimate with dark wood and a library type vibe. The bathrooms are downstairs, and my friend rightfully insisted that a visit to them is absolutely necessary. You walk down these grand marble stairs past the wine cellar and through a hallway of light colored marble and arched doorways. The vibe downstairs was enough to make me want to move in.

The menu choice is either a la carte or a tasting menu of six courses, which has a bit of a high price point at \$175 per person. We went a la carte and, as I was still full the next morning, I believe that we made the right choice. The amuse bouche was a pumpkin soup with roasted chestnuts and a rice paper packet with pine nuts in it. This was exactly the warming and comforting introduction I needed on the windy, rainy day we went. They brought two amuse rolls, one was rosemary and the other had some sort of fruit in it (I think apple). Both were awesome with a crunchy crust and soft interior.

Then I was sent into an absolutely overwhelmed state. They proceeded to roll a bread cage over to our table for what would be the first of many visits. Yes, I said bread cage. It was this cart with about 8 different types of bread to choose from. The bread cart driver sliced your selection tableside and just grabbed another from his cage when a loaf ran out. My friend Jen and I both had a slice of garlic bread and a slice of fig bread to start. On the second visit, my friend couldn't resist trying the pistachio hazelnut bread and I am glad she couldn't because it proved to be my favorite of the breads we had. All the breads the entire evening were absolutely outrageous good. In many ways, it seems with all the fanfare surrounding the bread cart the restaurant wants the bread to be the standout item of the evening. The remainder of the food was very good, but when someone mentions Bouley my first thought will always be the bread.

For an appetizer I had shrimp, sea scallops, dungeness crab, and calamari in a herbal broth and Jen had tuna with turnip and radish in a yuzu-miso dressing. All of the seafood on my dish was perfectly cooked. There were two shrimp, one was simply grilled and the other was fried. The scallop was pan-fried to be crispy and it looked like they had been partially pushed through a large grater with the top was split into many cubes. The calamari was stuffed and just awesome. All of this was served atop a bed of crab with a green herb broth. The dish and the broth were extremely tasty. My friend Jen's was also really good, but a bit generic. I love yuzu and miso, but there was nothing in the dish that made it extraordinary.

For my main, I had the Chicken with Carrot Ravioli, hen of the woods mushrooms, and Pain d'épice dressing. Jen had the roasted duck with white truffle honey, chanterelles, asparagus, and porcini puree. Hands down Jen's dish won. That's not to say my chicken wasn't extraordinary. It was certainly the most tender piece of chicken ever, so much so that I was cutting it with my fork. And the ravioli, which is what really made me order the dish in the first place was amazing. The idea of a sweet carrot puree in pasta is just pure genius. And the pain d'epice sauce, which is a gingerbread spice type mixture, was really wonderful but I would have liked more. I know after that description you're wondering how Jen's dish could have been better. Well, Jen's had this white truffle honey sauce that was outstanding and without a doubt one of the best sauces I've had in a while. And the duck itself was insanely tender and delicious.

For a pre-dessert they brought melon soup with ricotta sorbet which really wasn't for me. There are a few things that shouldn't be made into a liquid and I think melon is one of them. I also was not at all a fan of the ricotta sorbet, as it just wasn't as sweet as I'd like a frozen dessert to be. For dessert, we had the chocolate frivolous. This was a smorgasbord of all things chocolate...a chocolate brulee, a hazelnut Dacquoise, a nougatine, a warm chocolate lava cake, a rich chocolate ice cream, and another ice cream that had what tasted like prunes in it. When it arrived, my first thought was it was too much on one plate. But I liked every component and couldn't possibly pick one to remove!

After our dessert, our server brought a silver tower of petit fours. The petit fours included carrot spice macaroons, rich butter cookies covered in white and dark chocolate, coconut lemon wafer cookies, a truffle, and sesame sandwich cookies. I'm not sure if I was so full that I just couldn't enjoy these or whether they were only average, but there was nothing that stood out from the tower that I wanted to have again. Maybe it was all that bread!

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