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DiningOut Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen

Dishing up down-home favorites with a modern touch

By William Porter
The Denver Post

Dining at Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen poses a culinary conundrum: When does comfort food enter the discomfort zone, in terms of both strained waistbands and a doctor announcing that your cholesterol level looks like a Harvard whiz kid's SAT score?

The LoDo restaurant opened in August, the latest venture from chef Jennifer Jasinski and her business partner, Beth Gruitch, who also operate Rioja and Bistro Vendôme.

While Euclid Hall is just around the corner from its sister restaurants, the soul-satisfying food is a departure from the refined fare that

made Jasinski a star.

This is hearty cooking that salutes its Old World roots and embraces the recent return of American comfort food to the menus of ambitious chefs. The results are largely laudable, although not by your cardiologist.

Chicken and waffles, at \$12.50, featured a lightly breaded paillard of yard bird, with sourdough waffles, maple syrup and walnuts that added notes of salt and crunch to that Atlanta cult favorite.

Veal schnitzel had a crunchy, golden crust. A dining companion who is a native German pronounced it perfectly sautéed, but noted the cutlet could be thicker. As it was, it had been pounded to the thickness of a poker chip.

Pan-braised sturgeon, the priciest item on the menu, at \$17.50, was peppery, the firm white flesh translucent in the middle. It came in a duck broth aswim with diced potatoes and winter veggies.

Sandwiches include basics such as brat burgers, cheesesteaks and oyster po'boys, plus an inventive take with griddled camembert and sweet-tart peach preserves. The last came with a throwback side: a Waldorf salad balancing all the flavor and textural elements of sweet apple and crunchy cabbage.

Roasted cauliflower salad arrived with an eye-opening but worthwhile addition of goat cheese, layered atop a sweet pepper marmalade.

DINING » 2D

DINING: At Euclid Hall, comfort fare served with a Euro-twist

◀◀ FROM 1D

One side dish went awry. Caraway spaetzle, the gnocchi-like noodle from southern Germany, was properly firm and beautifully browned. So why douse it in "10,000 Island dressing," basically 1,000 Island dressing that went up to 11, sort of like the volume knobs on the Spinal Tap amps. It was an outright flavor mismatch, totally out of character for a Jasinski restaurant.

Hats off to the waiter who voluntarily struck it from the tab, reflecting the uniform friendliness of the staff.

A quartet of house-made sausages proved a winner. The plate featured boudin blanc, which is a French pork sausage, and Bavarian veal weisswurst. Both were savory, but the knockouts were a kielbasa made of beef short ribs, which was dense and intense, and a boudin noir. The latter had the color and tight but light grain of a chocolate brownie. Made with pasteurized beef blood, pork, a bit of roasted eggplant to bind it, and touches of curry and golden raisins, it was borderline revelatory.

There are three poutines, the classic gravy-smothered French-fry dish from Quebec. A wild mushroom version featured sautéed crimini and oyster mushrooms with cheddar curds, smothered in porcini gravy. Roast-duck and braised-beef versions are also offered. Mercifully, the kitchen will send out half-portions of these belt-busters.

Condiments are artful. Four homemade mustards are available: yellow, whole-grain Bordeaux, horseradish and a spicy-brown. There are several pickle types, running the flavor gamut, plus a tomato jam that is at once sweet and bright in the mouth.

About the beverages: While there is a large selection of wines and craft cocktails, Euclid Hall prides itself on beer and ales, whether a \$5.25 Oskar Blues pilsener or a 750-milliliter bottle of Boulevard Brewing Bourbon Barrel Quad, yours for \$37.75.

The main beer list is divided into six sections whose nomenclature teeters on that fine line between clever and cutesy. The categories are Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus and Quantum Mathematics, based on the ascending complexity of the brews.

Personally, having to think about trigonometry while ordering beer makes me want to skip the suds and head straight for a double shot of something more detrimental. Yes, the building's mathematician namesake was the father of geometry, but still.

The restaurant has two levels, with a bar on each one. The motif is bare brick walls, familiar to folks who recall when this 1883 building, originally a home, housed Soapy Smith's Double Eagle Bar. The upstairs features a tin ceiling, an atrium with a view the kitchen's front line, and windows offering some of the prettiest mountain views of any downtown restaurant.

Crowds skew young — the menu doesn't favor middle-aged metabolisms — which perhaps accounts for the thudding music. The dim lighting come evening also doesn't favor middle-aged eyesight. On one recent night, a couple at a neighboring table read the menu with a penlight.

The restaurant's motto is "Crafted. Not cranked out."

This shows, and save for a stumble or two on the menu, Jasinski and Gruitch — along with chef de cuisine Jorel Pierce — can be proud.

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Jennifer Jasinski's new cookbook, "The Perfect Bite," is available now at Euclid Hall or online at riojadenver.com.

EUCLID HALL BAR & KITCHEN

Carnivore palace
1317 14th St.,
303-595-4255.
euclidhall.com

★★★ Very Good/Great
Atmosphere: Vaulted brick walls with subdued lighting that exudes a warm, old-world vibe.

Service: Cheery, knowledgeable

Beverages: Extensive beer and wine list, plus signature house cocktails

Plates: Entrees \$9.50-\$17.50, small plates \$4-\$16

Hours: Sunday: 11 a.m.-midnight; Monday-Thursday: 11:30 a.m.-midnight; Friday: 11:30 a.m.-1 a.m.; Saturday: 3 p.m.-1 a.m. Daily happy hour 3-6 p.m.

Details: Casual place that doesn't beat you over the head with too-cool-for-you hipness. You're in LoDo, so there are plenty of valet opportunities to lessen the parking aggravation.
Three visits

Our star system:
★★★★: Exceptional
★★★: Great
★★: Very Good
★: Good