

# {dining}



► Julep's blackened bouillabaisse, served over steamed jasmine rice

## ► JULEP'S NEW SOUTHERN CUISINE

1719-21 E. Franklin St.  
377-3968

### Price Ranges

Lunch: Salads \$6 to \$10. Sandwiches \$6 to \$9. Big plates \$8 to \$10. A la carte \$1.50 to \$3.25. Desserts \$4 to \$12.  
Dinner: Appetizers \$6 to \$11. Salads \$6 to \$9. Main courses \$16 to \$24. Desserts \$4 to \$12.

### Hours

Lunch is served Monday to Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Dinner is served Tuesday to Saturday, 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

► REVIEW

## SOUTHERN FARE, NOUVEAU FLAIR

*Julep's revisits old favorites and does it well*

[BY MARTIN GRAVELY]

There's a great restaurant in Charleston, S.C., called Slightly North of Broad, or S.N.O.B. It's a place of some culinary acclaim that bills itself as a "maverick Southern kitchen," and my wife, Lisa, and I love eating there.

So it was with great enthusiasm that we recently visited Julep's — in Shockoe Bottom — to sample its "new Southern cuisine." We so hoped it would rival its low country counterpart in delivering high-quality, updated Southern fare.

As it turns out, Julep's head chef Eric Cohen has visited S.N.O.B. Prior to opening the doors of Julep's last May, proprietors Bill and Amy Cabaniss (former owners of Cabo's) sent Cohen down south on a preparatory culinary field trip. S.N.O.B. was one of many stops in his travels.

As you might expect, there's a Southern twang to virtually every one of Cohen's creations. While truer with some dishes than others, quintessential Southern elements can be found in most every dish.

Located in an old lumber house dating back to 1817, Julep's is a cozy, softly lit spot complete with a wide staircase that spirals above the bar area to their inviting dining room. Upstairs, guests find themselves in a mellow loft accented with rustic, exposed beams, glowing hurricane lamps and white linens.

Lisa and I began our first visit with fried green tomatoes (\$6). Cooked golden brown in panko bread crumbs, the thick slices of fruit were paired with zippy red pepper ►

◀ crème fraîche, a balsamic-vinegar reduction and a helping of peppery micro arugula.

We also shared a bowl of sweet-potato bisque (\$6). While too thick for our tastes, it was piping hot and redolent of its signature ingredient. A sprinkling of toasted pumpkin seeds provided a crunchy accent.

Lisa's tenderloin of beef (\$22) — "Southernized" by the addition of Virginia wine in the dish's Cabernet demi-glace — came with creamy whipped potatoes and crisp, vivid-green haricots verts. While no new ground was broken here, all components were well prepared, and the meat's temperature was on the nose.

I went with sesame-crusting tuna steak (\$23) — an ultra-fresh hunk of high-quality fish served with a maple-and-esspresso sauce, okra pancakes and haricots verts. While the sauce made for great sopping with the crispy pancakes, I found it too sweet and heavy for pairing with delicate tuna.

We finished up with a N'awlins classic, bananas Foster (\$12). Served in a crunchy cookie shell, the trio of brown sugar, dark rum and ripe fruit was mixed and flambéed in pleasing proportion by our server. While satisfying our collective sweet tooth, we felt the dessert should have been larger for the price.

I returned soon thereafter for lunch. Dying for some hearty soup to warm my bones, I opted for the entree gumbo (\$10). It was outstanding. Smothering a hefty dollop of fluffy, white-cheddar grits was a thick, gorgeous broth teeming with smoked shrimp, chicken and andouille sausage. Obvious care had been taken to create the characteristic dark-brown roux and infuse a perfect level of heat. To my satisfaction, it wasn't just heat without flavor.

Pears poached in port wine (\$6) proved a refreshing finale. They were juicy, lightly sweetened and served with sweet mascarpone and a biscotti-like, crunchy almond shortbread.

The unusually high hopes I had for Julep's indeed were mostly met and, in some cases, exceeded. That's great news, 'cause the Bottom is a heck of a lot closer than Charleston. ■