

FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY GEORGE W. STONE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY POWERS AND CREWE



VIRGINIA HAUTE Above: Tallula's cork-top tables and stacked wine cellar add a spirited touch to an eatery determined to maintain a neighborhood-friendly vibe. Left: A quail egg tops chef Nathan Andra's beer-to-brine fish-guzz appetizer.

BLOCK PARTY *Clarendon's ascent as a culinary capital is capped by chic, cheery neighborhood eatery Tallula*

When my friend declared in a voice that swept across Tallula's crimson and gold dining room "I want to pour this all over my body!" we could have called it a night right then and there. A hipster with spiked red hair was the first to gawk, a beamer couple on mid-week date-night choked on lava beans and soon the only dining audible was the trickle of a green glass pebble fountain and a clang in the semi-exposed kitchen.

This moment of overexposure was brought to us by Cina Chenevise, the master mixologist whose *Cosmo's Water* inspired the baroque image. Who knew that lavender syrup, Hendrick's gin, fresh lime and an aromatic ribbon of English cucumber could so stir the soul? Even the name of the elite conjures happy thoughts of Hobbiton. It took a champagne cocktail with a floating chip of house-candied horseradish to reclaim my senses. You know you're in good hands when bubbly brings you back down to Earth.

June is RAMMYS season and restaurateurs around town are all awitler, awaiting the annual awards ceremony where DC's top foodies take a bow in a bacchanalian affair. This year, Clarendon's Tallula is nominated in all the right ways. Chef Nathan Andra is a rising culinary star, the eatery's wine and cocktail program is going for gold and the pastry perfectionist is smelling victory. Last year, Tallula took home the top informal restaurant prize.

Don't come here expecting French Laundry-style cutlery and souz-vides. Tallula is neighborhood good, not Napa Valley-orgasmic. But if you like pork, you'll love Andra's cuisine. Some of the chef's best friends are pigs,

and porcine elements appear in more

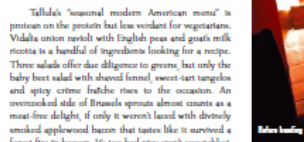
An appetizer of pork belly confit with

groceries and porcine froth is swash in "finger-friendly two-bites" or head a risk it all and go for both! Here's my a on the "Assume You're Not" menu, with barbecue pork piquant, beer-battered ideas, but they arrive in a cloud of oil try the zesty scallops was born cavied cheese tulle. The baby burger with bd but sliders are slipping into chiché to space at a premium, gobbling a first-

Andra says he lost ten pounds we fetters all day. But he's still lively with a marvel. Fatty, salty lobes lurk be treated treats: fete-gras pound cake touch to each forkful. Sunchoke you seal points for its petti filet of hoi nostalgic around smoked trout? Or neighborhood nostalgia. And yet it culinary destination is a challenge it



Good wine is the wall of Tallula.



Bacon leading to Tallula, all of Tallula.



Cosmo's top the house's blue cocktail.

Tallula's "seasonal modern American menu" is protein on the protein but low verdant for vegetarians. Vidua onion ravioli with English peas and goat's milk ricotta is a handful of ingredients looking for a recipe. Three salads offer due diligence to greens, but only the baby beet salad with shaved fennel, sweet tart tangylo and spicy crème fraiche rises to the occasion. An overcooked side of Brussels sprouts almost counts as a meat-free delight, if only it weren't laced with divinely smoked applewood bacon that tastes like it survived a forest fire in heaven. Its too bad pigs aren't vegetable!

Interestingly, given his passion for the pig, Andra claims that his favorite ingredient to play around with is scallops. Although they appear in only one form on his menu, the dish is a doozy. Perfectly frenched seared diver scallops rest atop a rich hotdogrow of sautéed baby chard, asparagus and sautéed parsnip. The sweetness of the scallops and bitter bite of the greens find a frosty matchmaker in a seductive ginger emulsion, which forms a pool of tiny tasty bubbles around the dish. And what's that lurking beneath the bivalves? Yes! Fragrant bits of bacon!

Tallula's well-conceived menu offers just the right number of options, but lapses in execution upset the balance. Temporary, in particular, seems to be a challenge. On one visit, my scallops were tepid in the middle, on another visit they were just right. Once, our Shenandoah lamb (with a dreamy goat cheese fritter) was headed back into the kitchen to achieve "medium-rare," when it returned, it was a magical piece of meat.

And now, a word on wine. Tallula is the concept of a triptych that includes the jovial gastropub Eatbar, a budget-friendly eatery also helmed by Andra—devoid the bacon-wrapped figs with mascarpone cheese or the pork paradise charcuterie plate—and a small shop called Planet Wine, which sells bottles from the menu. For those who become more acquisitive as the night wears on, this is a real boon. For everyone, it underscores Tallula's commitment to selecting smart and surprising wines. Size, \$50

TALLULA 1701 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD, ARLINGTON, VA 22201. WEB SITE: WWW.TALLULARESTAURANT.COM. HOURS: SUN-THUR 5:30-10PM, FRI-SAT 5:30-11PM. DRESS: CASUAL. TAB: \$10. THE SOCIAL: LOCAL WINE BOTTLE IN THIS DISCREET, AIR-CONDITIONED, COUNTRY-COUNTRY-FOOD SPACE. WHO'S THERE: WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? IF YOUR FOOD IS CLAVENING, IT'S A BLEND OF INDIVIDUALS: BOURGEOIS, HIPSTERS AND KIDS ON THE BLOCK. WHAT TO KNOW: TALLULA MAKING BAKING, A CLASSY & SASSY CATERER WITH A BREATHER, INDEPENDENT WINE, FUNKY BOTTLES, A SASSY MOST WINE AND COOL. DRINKS: COW BOURGEOIS, ICE BEST BOURGEOIS, PRESSED BEE THE ISSUE. MAKE IT DRINK: APPETIZO 12-14, ENRICHED 12-14, COUNTRY 12-14, COUNTRY WATER, PRESSED BOTTLE. ★★

What the stars mean: 1 = Not even noteworthy; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above average; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

A SIDE OF BRUSSELS SPROUTS MIGHT ALMOST COUNT AS A MEAT-FREE DELIGHT, IF ONLY IT WEREN'T LACED WITH DIVINELY SMOKED APPLEWOOD BACON THAT TASTES LIKE IT SURVIVED A FOREST FIRE IN HEAVEN.