

THE WHITNEY HOUSE TABLE & TAVERN

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Photography by James Henthorn

For those guests lucky enough to grab a seat at the Chef's bar at The Whitney House, perhaps a warning sign or two are in order. Something along the lines of: "Beware, future dining expectations will be inexorably elevated;" or "Proceed with caution - decisions will become exceedingly more difficult as the night goes on." The tantalizing procession of beautifully plated signature dishes to which Chef's bar diners bear witness are enough to inspire doubt in the most confident epicurean. Where to begin?

As an array of starters and snacks ambled by, my cohort and I engaged in spirited conversation about what to order: Pickled Veggies, the Tartare Duo, Kung Pao Shrimp? With Chef Max Avon's encouragement (we may not have required that much, actually), all three were soon set before us. Channeling my farm girl roots, I went straight for the Pickled Vegetables. An indescribable combination of savory herbs refreshingly balanced the acerbity of pickling (without the sugar so often used), making this crunchy snack unbelievably addictive. I asked of plans to package the crisp craveables, but learned it is challenging enough keep an adequate supply on hand for the dine-in crowd. A creative interpretation of surf-and-turf, the Tartare Duo presents hand-cut beef alongside a combination of hand-cut fresh and smoked salmon served classically with pickled onion, caper, chopped egg, whole grain mustard and baguette chips. The delicious Kung Pao Shrimp were of hearty size and portion - a common theme throughout the menu.

As our meal gained momentum, engaging with Chef Max while he worked was a highlight. Even while he meticulously reviewed each plate during what looked to an outsider to be a hectic dinner rush, Chef Max remained impossibly affable, relaxed and simply charming. His suggestions were spot-on, and his insights about ingredients, concepts and the process by which Columbus' latest hot spot has become a reality added an element of familiarity to our experience that is really at the heart of The Whitney House philosophy. They describe their ambitions as an intent "to pay homage to the homes of our past that welcomed all, treated everyone like family, and offered delicious food and drink." Chef Max is living the brand.



Best
Cuisine in the Pacific Northwest
by MICHELLE KAPLAN
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10/15/12

The WHITNEY House



In a reversal of roles, the dining room of the Whitney house is usually a bit more bustling than the bar - thanks to an open kitchen and lively Chef's Bar.

The proprietor of The Whitney House, Ian Brown, joined us for a portion of our meal. Like Chef Max, he handled the demands of the evening effortlessly - lingering for a casual conversation as if nothing were more important than connecting with us. Their easygoing natures belie a true passion for creative, authentic and yes - craveable - dishes that becomes evident when either tells The Whitney House story. Inspired by a gracious family who lived on Whitney Avenue (not far away in Worthington), the duo started with dishes that "made them happy." Having cut their teeth in the Brio family of restaurants (indisputably one of Columbus' most revered culinary groups), Brown and Avon were ready to put their own mark on the genre of the American bistro. Unlike most culinary entrepreneurs who experiment with multiple iterations before settling on decor, menu and atmosphere during the conceptual process, you'll find no identity crisis within these walls. It's all about delivering on a singular philosophy of home away from home.

When planning the homey interior, Brown wisely called on noted residential designer, Mark Huffman. Known for his swanky, old-school-chic style, Huffman embraced the challenge

of designing his first restaurant with unbridled enthusiasm. Woods are dark, fabrics rich. Exposed brick walls were refined with a hand-painted, distressed finish - giving the entire space the feeling of having been there for years. The layout is simple, but exceedingly functional: an open, central kitchen services the dining room in the front, bar area in the back. Staff moves through tables and service areas quickly and quietly - and the entire restaurant maintains the same sense of relaxed calm that emanates from its leadership.

Our meal was punctuated by several items worth mentioning. From the cocktail menu, Rose's Flip is a beguilingly light drink of rosewater, gin, berry syrup and egg white flip. The Ruth is as bold as it sounds: at heart, a pomegranate martini presented in an oversized coupe. Dinner portions are large and perfect for sharing. The Pan-Seared Trout (my choice) was well-balanced with purple-potato hash with bacon, wilted greens and Tabasco butter sauce. Bolstered by my adventurous spirit (ahem, I'd like to think!), my friend (and a regular of The Whitney House) steered away from his usual selection to the Bone-In Pork Chop with Panko crust and rhubarb-onion chutney.