

Roving Gourmet

by Patrick O'Sullivan

Tavern on Jane

31 Eighth Ave., Manhattan;
(212) 675-2526

Tavern on Jane sits on a nondescript corner of Eighth Ave. and Jane St. It's easy to miss and that's a pity, because if you do, you're missing one of the warmest, coziest, most unpretentious spots in Greenwich Village. Yes, the service is excellent, the food good and the prices extremely reasonable. But you don't need to sample any of these to get a sense of what makes this place so special. You'll know that as soon as you walk inside. It's got atmosphere.

Maybe it's the film posters on the wall, the large wooden wine cabinet at the bottom of the bar, or the oscillating ceiling fans. Then again, it might be the music, a constant stream of blues the night we were there, which is loud enough for effect but subdued enough for conversation.

We sipped a lovely Merlot and chatted as we waited for our appetizers, half-listening to the music, half-watching the dancing, flickering shadows of the ceiling fans.

Stuffed Crabcakes with Mescal (an \$8 special) was the first dish to appear. Crisp and meaty, more crab than cake, it came on a bed of fresh, mixed greens. Vegetarian Spring Rolls (\$4.95) were deep-fried and crunchy, filled with carrots and cabbage. They made me want to munch for my wine.

Mussels in White Wine & Fresh Herbs (\$15.95) were recommended to us by the waitress. What we got was a heaping plateful of mollusks in a mild garlic broth with big chunky lumps of tomato. We weren't disappointed.

Hot to trot

With three hot appetizers on our palates, we were ready for something cold and zesty. Roasted Beets with Beet Greens & Arugula (\$5.95) fit the bill quite nicely. Sweet and refreshing, in an oil and vinegar dressing, this dish brought our toasted taste buds back to life. We were ready for the entrees.

But not so fast. First, we had to eat our greens. (Most entrees at Tavern on Jane come with a salad and a choice of vegetable.) Be sure to ask for the Green Goddess dressing on your salad. It's a house specialty, a creamy, herby avocado concoction that's reminiscent of ranch but much milder.

Half-Grilled Chicken with Natural Pan Juices (\$8.95) looked like a bargain on the menu. When it appeared, with a side of crispy french fries and arugula, I thought I'd gotten the best deal in town. The chicken was tender, juicy and delicious. But it was the fries that got all the attention. Someone said these fries reminded her of the kind she used to get in Coney Island 30 years ago. After that, I had to fight off my companions from picking at them. It was a losing battle.

You'd think they would have been



FOOD FEST It's three cheers to fine dining at Tavern on Jane.

A Menu Flexes Its Mussels — & More

Prices and atmosphere just right at cozy Village eatery

happy with their own dishes. Like Oven-roasted Herb Salmon with Lemon Beurre Blanc (\$12.95). Just a little crispy on the surface, but soft and moist on the inside. And then there was the Grilled 12-ounce New York Shell Steak (\$13.95). Cooked to rare perfection, it was crisp and fortifying. Everyone wanted a piece of it, which was fine with me, as it gave my french fries some respite.

A nippy touch

The only disappointment of the evening was the Ginger Marinated Mako Shark with Wasabi Mashed Potatoes and Wilted Arugula (a \$18 special). It was a

little dry and dull. The Wasabi Mashed Potatoes, however, were fantastic, the nippy horseradish adding a welcome spark to an otherwise uninspired platter. (Mashed, fried, or baked — they sure know how to treat their spuds in this place.)

The music was still going strong as we gathered our coats together to leave. Who is that, Stevie Ray Vaughn? asked one of my companions, as we walked out onto Jane St. I wanted to stay, hear more, maybe have another drink and answer her question. But it was getting late. I guess I'll just have to come back.

IN THE NABE



JENNIFER S. ALTMAN

STREET SCENE Tavern on Jane is in the heart of Greenwich Village, in close proximity to many landmark sites. Just across the street there's the Corner Bistro (331 W. Fourth St.), home, it is said, of New York's best hamburgers. And if you feel like walking a block or two to Hudson Street, you can have a pint at the White Horse Tavern (567 Hudson St.), where the great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas once held court.

FROM THE BOROUGHS

FROM THE BRONX

BY CAR: Triborough Bridge to FDR. Turn right onto 25th St. then left onto Park Ave. South, followed by a turn onto Union Square East, turn right onto 14th St. and left onto Seventh Ave., then right onto Greenwich Ave. and left onto Jane St.
BY SUBWAY: C to 14th St. Walk two blocks down Eighth Ave. to Jane St.

FROM BROOKLYN

BY CAR: Manhattan Bridge to Canal St. Turn right onto Greenwich St. and then right onto Spring St. followed by a left onto Hudson St. Continue on to Eighth Ave.
BY SUBWAY: A/C to 14th St. Walk two blocks down Eighth Ave. to Jane St.

FROM QUEENS

BY CAR: Midtown Tunnel to 34th St. Turn left onto Sixth Ave. which becomes Hudson St. Turn left at 12th St. and then left onto Eighth Ave.
BY SUBWAY: E to 14th St. Walk two blocks down Eighth Ave. to Jane St.

FROM STATEN ISLAND

BY CAR: Verrazano Bridge to Brooklyn-Queens Expressway to Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. Turn right onto West Side Highway and then right onto 10th St. followed by a left onto Hudson St. Continue on to Eighth Ave.



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