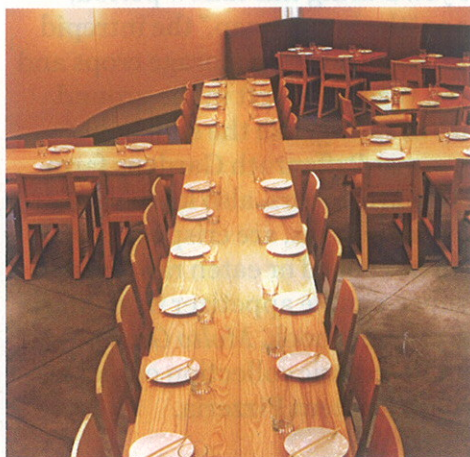


Má Pêche

15 W. 56th St., nr. Fifth Ave.; 212-757-5878



AFTER A FIVE-MONTH warm-up of hotel-mezzanine food service and takeout lunch, Má Pêche, a.k.a. Momofuku Midtown, makes its official (lunch-only, no-reservations) debut this week. What was once Town restaurant has been redesigned by Thomas Schlessler as an artfully simple series of distinctive spaces. The front door opens into a takeout branch of Momofuku Milk Bar, selling the bakery's signature Compost Cookies, Cereal Milk, and Crack Pie to go. Beyond is the host stand and the sleek Balcony Bar, open all day for breakfast, lunch, and a limited bar menu until 11 p.m. Down a flight of stairs, stretched-canvas panels cocoon the roughly 85-seat dining room, home to a crisscrossed communal table, a four-stool raw bar, and a single esoteric artwork (*Bad Route* by Miguel Calderón). Schlessler calls the layered juxtaposition of eco-friendly materials like plywood, particleboard, and fiberboard a metaphor for the mixing of cultures evident on chef Tien Ho's trilingual menu, which applies French and Vietnamese words (and English descriptions) to Asian-inflected bistro staples. "Bò tartare" is made from Niman Ranch beef, scallions, and mint; "raie a la Dufresne" tweaks brown-buttered skate with lime and pea shoots in a sly nod to wd-50 chef Wylie; jowl croustons and tripe transform the classic frisée aux lardons. To drink: wines ranging from Moroccan Syrah to Red Hook rosé.



Blood-orange-rhubarb pie from Four & Twenty Blackbirds.

Quattro Gastronomia Italiana

246 Spring St., at Varick St.;
212-842-4500

Fabrizio and Nicola Carro, Piedmont natives and identical twins who run the kitchen of Miami's Quattro Gastronomia Italiana, must be the envy of every multitasking celebrity chef. (Imagine what Mario Batali would give for a twin brother who could cook?) Now, Fabrizio has moved up north to helm a new Quattro outpost at the Trump SoHo, while Nicola remains in Florida. The design of the bi-level space echoes its sister restaurant with black granite and leather banquettes, and the menu covers familiar regional Italian ground, from arancini to vitello tonnato to the signature

braised-beef-filled agnolotti. Fabrizio, a good Italian, will proudly import as many ingredients from the old country as possible—screw the food miles—but says he isn't opposed to exploring our city's Greenmarkets too.



Terroir Tribeca

24 Harrison St., nr. Greenwich St.;
212-625-9463

This week, Paul Grieco and Marco Canora open the second branch of their gleefully anti-establishment wine bar, a space with almost triple the seats and a bona fide kitchen. This means Canora can augment Italian snacks like bone-marrow bruschetta (pictured) with fried meatballs, new sandwiches, a lamb blade steak, and a thin-sliced dry-aged sirloin. Grieco's so-called wine lists—three-ring binders that are the madcap Beard Award-nominated work of graphic designer (and Gramercy Tavern captain) Steven Solomon—are new for this location and cull from all corners and cultivars, including a Finger Lakes Riesling on tap. R.R. & R.P.

Sunchokes

IN SEASON

The calendar says spring, but the Greenmarket isn't quite there yet. During this fallow period, known by Brits as "the hungry gap," the intrepid seasonal eater is still adrift in storage crops and overwintered vegetables left in the ground and dug up in spring, like the sunchokes available now at Paffenroth Gardens farm stand. The gnarly tubers, also known as Jerusalem artichokes, are crisp and nutty and can be cooked or eaten raw, as in this super-simple appetizer from Mario Batali's newest book, *Molto Gusto*, a vegetable-centric collection of recipes from his Otto Enoteca Pizzeria.

er, and on crowded evenings the harried waiters occasionally crash into each other. But Schaedelin—who has also worked for two Ducasse restaurants in Europe and been the executive chef at Le Cirque—has revamped and expanded the classic brasserie menu, instilling it with some much-needed professional zip.

The quenelles de brochet (\$22, in a dreckish, rust-colored Nantua sauce) remain distressingly rubbery ("Maybe they're supposed to be that way," offered Mrs. Platt brightly), but the onion soup has a bubbly, agreeably thick gratinée top, and Schaedelin's signature tarte flambée is worth a special trip. The salmon en croûte was as big as a toaster (that's too big), and the fresh, hand-chopped beef tartare seemed slightly oversauced. But the boudin aux pommes has a nice, crisp snap to it, and other stately old delicacies (steak au poivre with Brussels sprouts, duck à l'orange without too much orange) were well received by our little group of Francophiles. The thing to get on a cold, early spring afternoon, however, is Schaedelin's faithful rendition of Rachou's legendary cassoulet. It's made with tarbais beans and faintly caramelized hunks of pork belly and country sausage, and is so filling that when dessert rolls around, you'll only need a taste of the excessively large tarte Tatin (\$24 for two) or the famous Ducasse baba au rhum, which is as rich, decorative, and exquisitely boozy as ever.

SCRATCHPAD

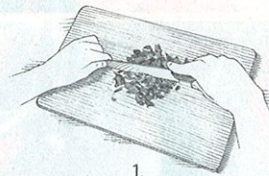
BISTRO DE LA GARE: One star for the neighborly scale and another for the Italianate dishes. Minus one for the prices.

BENOIT: This is one-star food cooked with two-star panache. But the space and layout still bring everything down a notch.

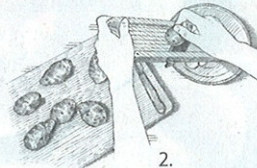
BITES

BISTRO DE LA GARE: IDEAL MEAL: Scallops, chicken cacciatore, panna cotta. **NOTE:** Lunchtime service (with a signature burger, of course) will begin next week. **HOURS:** Dinner, Tuesday through Sunday 5:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. **PRICES:** Appetizers \$9 to \$12; entrées \$18 to \$32.

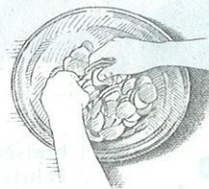
BENOIT: IDEAL MEAL: Tarte flambée, cassoulet or duck à l'orange, baba au rhum. **NOTE:** The three-course \$25 lunchtime prix fixe is one of the better deals in midtown. **HOURS:** Dinner, Monday through Thursday 5:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.; lunch, Monday through Saturday 11:45 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. **PRICES:** Appetizers \$12 to \$25; entrées \$19 to \$44.



1.



2.



3.

MARIO BATALI'S SUNCHOKES WITH WALNUT GREMOLATA

- 1/3 cup fresh Italian parsley
- 1/4 cup walnuts, toasted and finely chopped
- 2 tbs. slivered orange zest
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 pound firm sunchokes, scrubbed
- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- Maldon or other flaky sea salt and coarsely ground black pepper

(1) Coarsely chop the parsley, and combine with walnuts, orange zest, and garlic in a small bowl, mixing well. (2) Using a Benriner (Japanese mandoline) or other vegetable slicer, thinly shave the sunchokes. Transfer to a bowl and drizzle with the olive oil, (3) tossing well to thoroughly coat the sunchokes. Season with salt and pepper, sprinkle with the gremolata, and serve. Serves 6. Adapted from *Molto Gusto*, by Mario Batali and Mark Ladner (Ecco; \$29.99). R.R. & R.P.