

Food for the soul

THE KING STREET TRIO — A CHOP HOUSE, BISTRO AND PIANO BAR — IS SURE TO LEAVE YOU WITH A SMILE

BY ANDREW COPPOLINO
FOR NIGHTLIFE

To create an elegant yet casually comfortable atmosphere, King Street Trio has drawn eclectically from different restaurant styles: airy bistro, classic chop house, California fresh and refined piano bar. Similarly, the KST menu inventively draws together ingredients, techniques and flavours: East meets West and classical French techniques meet world cuisines.

An arrabbiata (“angry”) pasta sauce meets Provencal. A southern U.S. technique — pulled smoked chicken — meets funghi fettuccine. French brie fritters are Japanese panko-crumbed and served with down-home peach chutney, while a twist on Caesar salad juxtaposes sun-dried tomato dressing with traditional pancetta.

Chef Nicole Duffenais’ riff on the hokey ol’ traditional shrimp cocktail modernizes the basic poached tiger shrimp with a chipotle aioli. It all seems to work, and I was curious about prosciutto-wrapped scallops with porcini mushrooms, balsamic reduction and field berry vinaigrette. However, with more than 30 items on the KST dinner menu it was a matter of too much to eat and not enough time.

Soup du jour (\$6) — red lentil — has an attractive reddish colour and buoyant lentil flavour with a touch of earthiness wafting from the bowl. Another particularly delectable appetizer is six freshly shucked oysters (\$13) with a briny, salty smell of the sea. And that’s the way it should be — owner Brian Plouffe also runs King Crab Oyster Bar & Grill and knows his seafood.

Malpeque oysters, light, seductively slippery, slightly tangy — and alive — are given a King Street trio of three sauces for dipping; but I savoured the slippery little devils naked (the mullosks, not me) before slurping the pure, clear liquor out of the shell. It’s heavenly, and because it arouses your taste buds so well, it qualifies as a true appetizer.

Simple Hunan dumplings (\$7) are crisp wontons stuffed with a light-tasting pork,

sweetish hoisin, black beans, and a touch of spicy Thai peanut sauce. More classical elements of the dish are julienned roasted red pepper and a bed of baby spinach.

Steak and chop house lovers will love the Canadian Angus beef — from simple sirloin (\$25; I had one and it was good) to Earth and Ocean (a higher order, I guess, of surf and turf for \$39). It is a Parmesan-crusting lobster tail served with the classic French sauce *beurre blanc* of butter, wine, vinegar and shallots.

Both the six-ounce filet mignon (\$32) and the grilled pork loin (\$21) were admirably cooked and satiny melt-in-the-mouth. The latter was one serious porcine piece with just a slightly pink interior for juicy-sweet succulence. Both principle ingredients and the roasted potatoes were excellent though the kitchen let lukewarm vegetables slip out unnoticed (heated plates may be the answer here).

Regardless, high marks go right back to the kitchen’s ambitious and active pastry station: KST prepares six in-house desserts (\$6-\$8). Duffenais says she truly enjoys this part of her trade, and it shows in the quality of the sweets, all of which are appropriate winter-season selections including dark chocolate brownie, a genoise with strawberry compote, flambéed banana and pumpkin cheesecake. I found the *crème brûlée* of chocolate and mint liqueur quite good (though the attraction of mint and chocolate is not my favourite). A lively layered apple-cinnamon bread pudding with brown sugar was perfect for keeping winter’s chill at bay — sweet and tart along with crisp and velvety provided good contrasts.

Plouffe says the restaurant is expanding its wine list. It currently has good heft with a wide selection, good tasting notes and approachable appeal for both the aficionado and those simply looking for quaffers with their meals (and thumbs up for offering the “take-home-the-rest” wine program).

Aside from the ubiquitous Wolf Blass and Fat Bastard entries, there are several in-



teresting higher-end bottles — South African Meerlust cabernet sauvignon (\$84), Brunello di Montalcino (\$115) and a Chablis (\$52). There’s even a Mexican petite syrah and a chardonnay, interesting if only for their country of origin. The Ontario Strewn merlot (VQA \$34) that I sampled disappointed in its thin body, however.

Full credit to the service: on this moderately busy Saturday night, the staff were attentive, personable and knowledgeable, even while our waiter was also busy training a new staff member.

But what trumped both the slurped oysters, juicy meats, and winter-warming bread pudding was Fritz Boegli. Neither cook, nor waiter; neither wine nor German beef dish, Fritz’s station was the piano, where he shares duties tickling the ivories with fellow musician Andiry Tykhonov Wednesdays to Saturdays.

Live music adds its own flavour to a restaurant experience. The enjoyment Boegli gets out of playing — clearly evident in his smile — fills the room like his music — lovely notes that no doubt aid the digestion and lift the spirits in the blahs of winter.

KING STREET TRIO
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Dinner apps \$6 to \$13; mains \$14 to \$39. Sixty red and 40 white wines from \$25 to \$180 (many available by the glass or half-litre). Dinner for two with appetizers, mains, a shared dessert, glasses of wine, and coffee is about \$90 before taxes and gratuity.

Lunch Monday to Friday 11:30 p.m. to 2 p.m.; Dinner Monday to Tuesday 5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Wednesday to Thursday 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday to Saturday 5 p.m. to 11 p.m.; Sunday 4:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. Visa, MasterCard, Amex and debit accepted. Wheelchair access. A live jazz trio performs every third Tuesday.

• *Assessing food, atmosphere, service, and prices, Dining Out restaurant reviews are based on anonymous and unannounced visits to the establishments. Restaurants do not pay for any portion of the reviewer’s meal. Andrew Coppolino can be reached at andrew@tablescrap.com*

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Flavour fusions and explorations on Steve Allen’s menus; look for a table that offers a view of the street and classic Galt architecture (reviewed August 2006).

Peter Martin’s 20 King Restaurant, Kitchener (519-745-8939)

A downtown Kitchener stalwart, 20 King balances decor, atmosphere, service, and fresh, tantalizing cuisine (reviewed 2004).

Kristoria Fine Dining, Guelph (519-829-3265)

Art on a plate with tremendous flavour and excellent technique from Cordon Bleu-trained chef Victoria Blow (reviewed October 2005).

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