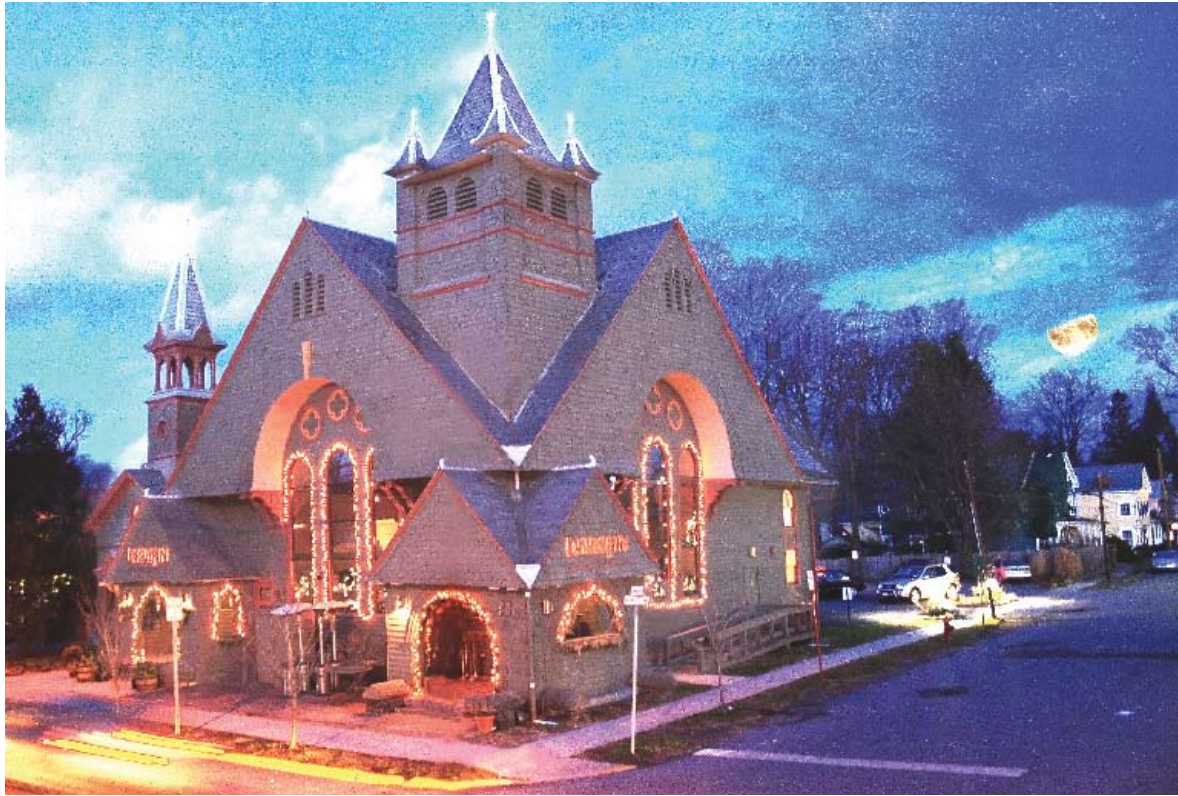


TERRAPIN

By Karin Edmondson



The opportunity of dining in a former church could—in this day and age of historical edifice recycling—realistically present itself once in a lifetime. Twice dining in a reclaimed church, however, might be cause for consideration of the possibility of some heavenly portent. My first ecclesiastical culinary ingestion occurred in the summer of 1991 at Limelight in New York City. The time: sometime in the early morning hours. One of the party promoters had decided to bring the summer barbecue in from suburban front lawns and present char-grilled delicacies to the nocturnal chic at Disco 2000. I distinctly recall sharing a hamburger with my girlfriend Lydia in a tiny cloistered space—open to the sky above—and accessible only by circuitous interior passage and by special invitation. The hamburger was unremarkable. The thrill of 3 am barbecue prepared by a sylph of a man with glittered eyelashes and silver body paint was wonderfully remarkable for a seventeen-year-old girl.

Fast forward seventeen years to the elegant hamlet of Rhinebeck on a country summer evening thick with crickets and the sweet wafting scent of hayfields. The exterior of the restaurant Terrapin glows—a sort of monolithic ode to gastronomy—its en

plein air diners seated at tables wedged charmingly into nooks and crannies, under arches and inside mini-porticoes of the former First Baptist Church, built in 1825. Not a speck of silver body paint in sight. Terrapin's inception and early years were in West Hurley, in the heart of the Catskill Mountains, but since 2003 the restaurant has settled dazzlingly into the current Rhinebeck location. *Chronogram* magazine bestowed upon it the honor of Best Restaurant in the Hudson Valley. *Hudson Valley Magazine* voted Terrapin as having the “Best Appetizer in the Hudson Valley” (and I wonder if it was perhaps the Macadamia Nut Tempura Calamari). Terrapin has received *Wine Spectator's* Award of Excellence for several years now. Chef/owner Josh Kroner, a graduate of the French Culinary Institute, has worked with such luminaries in the field as Bobby Flay and Emeril Lagasse. Terrapin has that certain thing—the “it” factor—a certain mélange of wit, style, sophistication and bonhomie.

Terrapin actually has two distinct dining areas: the casual Bistro and the Dining Room, a calming oasis of white tablecloths, soaring ceilings and lush bouquets of flowers arranged by Chef Kroner's mother. Patrick, our waiter for the evening, gently went

through the menu with us, suggesting standout dishes with disarming honesty. He followed his praise of Grilled Chicken Breast with Roquefort Mousse and Mushroom and Pork Lardon Demi-Glace and Mascarpone Polenta with “I don’t usually recommend chicken because everyone makes it at home but...” The really fabulous thing about Terrapin is its brilliant offering of Tapas sizes of some of the exceptional appetizers—Macadamia Nut Tempura Calamari or the Duck Quesadilla with Mango Avocado Salsa, and salads—Endive Wedge with Candied Walnut and Bleu Cheese, Crisp Apples and Balsamic Vinaigrette. There are also some dishes unique to the Tapas: Crispy Artichokes with Wasabi Aioli, Ham and Cheese Croquette with Maple Dijon Sauce and Grilled Lamb Chop with Chimichurri.

Each Tapas is enough for one generous bite for two people. Allow me to swoon over the Macadamia Nut Tempura Calamari with Pineapple Dipping Sauce. Heaven. Batter as ethereal (and un-greasy) as cloud puffs. (What else might clouds be made of but macadamia nut tempura?) The calamari sliced thick and juicy. The pineapple sauce is warm, textured like applesauce, comfortingly smooth and chunky at the same time. The Endive Salad with Candied Walnuts and Bleu Cheese is as far from banal salad experience as one might get. The bleu cheese is almost creamed, offering a textural counterpoint to the crisp endive and the snappy sweet of the candied walnut. Not a salad for the weight conscious. The BBQ Duck Quesadilla has the surprise of fontina cheese, a selection uncommon outside of cheese counters, that is imbued with delightful creaminess and offers foil to a distinct bite of diced jalapeño. The mango avocado salsa would elevate the humblest of crackers to an epicurean morsel. The only full size appetizer we ordered was the Potato Gnocchi with Sautéed Duck Livers, Shitake Mushrooms, Leeks and Sage Cream Sauce. Decadent, luxurious and utterly befitting autumn or winter. The gnocchi were some of the best, absolutely unstarchy, resolutely smooth, that I have ever encountered. The entirely vegetarian option—the Gingered Leek and Tofu Pot Sticker—was a zinger, flavorful and spicy. Who needs meat?

The bread basket deserves mention. Four pieces, two each of warm brioche and focaccia with black sesame seeds. All of the breads are made on premises. Butter and olive oil were brought to the table and when our bottle of Pellegrino arrived, Patrick asked if we desired ice. (We declined. Fizzy water sans ice is our penchant.) Details often elevate ordinary into extraordinary. Back in the early ‘90s olive oil as bread accompaniment might have been novel, but today, with diners’ collective consciousness about cholesterol or a yen toward veganism, olive oil arriving at the table unprompted is a proper yet altogether rare gesture.

One of our entrée choices—Horseradish Sushi-Grade Tuna with Miso Aioli—coincided with Patrick’s suggestion. The other, Sliced Coleman Grilled Hangar Steak with Terrapin’s own Horseradish Sauce and Steak Frites, I ordered willy nilly of recommen-

dations. The steak was done to perfection: crisp on the outside, tender, moist, just a hint of rare (sans pools of blood). A lovely piece of cow. The tuna, although expertly prepared, was, for my taste overshadowed by its dressings—the horseradish crust and then the Asian Flavored Oyster Mushrooms and Bok Choi. The plate was busy, a sensation of flavors that slightly stole the glory away from the luxurious (thick!) cut of Ahi.

Chef Kroner sources local produce and meats at every possible opportunity. Some farms he frequents include Migliorelli Farm for squash, zucchini, apples, greens, Swiss chard, mustard greens, berries, peaches and pears; Sky Farms for greens—mesclun and arugula; Ronnybrook Farms for dairy and ice cream; Irving Mink’s Farm for tomatoes and squash (this farmer loves his tomatoes—sometimes, coming in and introducing Josh to the gorgeous tomatoes he’s delivering!); Brittany Hollow for potatoes—Yukon, fingerling, red; Old Chatham Shepherding Company for cheese; Ray Tousey for honey and currants, and on occasion, Fleisher’s Grass Fed & Organic Meats.

The dessert menu is a lengthy one: with eleven offerings and seven of them available in Tapas portions, it duly makes for rampant and debauched samplings. Baklava was an airy assemblage of crisp, thin pastry sheets with honey, oodles of pistachio niblets, poached apricots and vanilla yogurt sorbet. Some baklava can be tedious and cloying. Terrapin’s baklava was more of an ethereal floop in a shimmering, gauzy sauce. The Lemon Buttermilk Cake was all elegance—a hint of lemon combined wonderfully with Whipped Raspberry Cream and Candied Lemon Peel. Fresh raspberries added a spritz of juicy texture. Chocolate and peanut butter make excellent partners—who can forget those iconic Reese’s commercials? Pastry Chef Derrin Tanyol elevates this classic duo to voluptuous stature, a most Rubenesque concoction of curves, cream, ethereal melding of chocolate and peanut butter. A perennial favorite, the Warm Molten Center Chocolate Cake, is just that: rich, dark chocolate thick, warm and melting into vanilla ice cream and the only dessert not created by Derrin since she joined Terrapin May of this year. Derrin, a self-taught pastry chef with a Ph.D. in Art History, utterly revamped and recharged the dessert menu, taking it from five or so passable offerings to the eleven or so triumphant creations currently available. She also enjoys making ice creams out of almost any item available in the kitchen, at least edible ones: lemongrass, basil, pineapple, candied orange. She creates savory sorbets too (beet, pickled fennel, among others). The sorbets and ice creams have a myriad of sauces available: chocolate, strawberry, caramel, espresso, white chocolate vanilla bean and dulce de leche. Get a little louche with dessert.

The same inventive spirit of the food menu is evident in the cocktail list with such imbibeables as Gooseberry Mojito with fresh ripe gooseberries, crushed mint and fresh lemons served with ten cane rum on the rocks, and Wasabi Bloody Mary and Black Currant Lemonade with Kettle One Citron vodka, fresh



squeezed lemons and black currant juice served on the rocks. The wine list is extensive with the menu divided into reds and whites and then subdivided within each category by state and country. New York State wines have a healthy representation on both the by the glass menu and the bottle menu. The By the Glass Menu features a Local Wine Spotlight—with a 2002 Merlot from Pellegrini Vineyards on Long Island and a 2006 Chardonnay from Lamoreaux Landing in the Finger Lakes Region.

A meal in the Dining Room at Terrapin is cause célèbre, a special indulgence, but rejoice: Terrapin also hosts a casual Bistro that features some of the Dining Room's standouts but also more casual fare like Baked Macaroni and Cheese, Eggplant Parm, Baja Style Fish Tacos, Fish and Chips, Terrapin Soul Food Plate and Bistro Steak Frites. The Terrapin Bistro Sandwich Board features eight sandwich bases—Coleman natural beef (1/2 pound or ¼ pound burger or sliced steak), shredded duck confit, grilled free range chicken breast, fried Chatham cod, Ahi tuna salad, veggie burger—and then categories of extras to build your own sandwich: Cheese (gruyère, brie, French blue, fresh mozzarella, manchego, smoked gouda, new york sharp cheddar, goat cheese),

Breads (soft brioche roll, crusty French baguette, sourdough sandwich bread, multi-grain sandwich bread, ciabatta hard roll, pita), Sauces (horseradish steak sauce, BBQ, lemon caper tartar, hummus, maple mustard, wasabi aioli, pesto, yoghurt mint cucumber raita). Then there are the Extras: bacon, avocado, sautéed portobellos, roasted red peppers, cured Moroccan olives, roasted poblano chilies, grilled eggplant and sprouts; and the Freebies: lettuce, tomato, smoked onions, sherried onion confit, sliced raw red onions. With so many outrageously delicious choices, I'd be there for hours constructing my perfect Terrapin sandwich.

Terrapin—restaurant, bistro, bar. A sort of culinary trinity in Rhinebeck. Terrapin Dining Room is open for dinner seven days a week, Monday through Thursday from 5 pm until 9:30 pm, until 10:30 pm on Friday and Saturday, and until 9 pm on Sunday. The Bistro and Bar are open for lunch and dinner seven days a week, Monday through Thursday from 11:30 am until 11:30 pm, until 12:30 am on Friday and Saturday and until 11 pm on Sunday. Terrapin is located at 6426 Montgomery Street in Rhinebeck. For reservations or more information please call 845 876 3330 or visit www.terrapinrestaurant.com.