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FOOD & DRINK

144 REVIEW New Upper East Side restaurant Ivy Lane provides three floors of stunning food and design.



FOOD & DRINK

review

COLOR THEORY

Art and food come together to disrupt the Upper East Side restaurant scene at Ivy Lane.

By Kendyl Kearly

With its proximity to luxe shopping and its regal, ivy-covered facade, new restaurant Ivy Lane might appear, from the outside at least, to be true to the feel of its Upper East Side location. Step inside, however, and Ivy Lane looks nothing like its posh neighbors, such as the more buttoned-up Hutong and Regency Bar & Grill.

But its divergence from UES norm is Ivy Lane's charm. Colorful murals and artwork cover nearly every bit of wall space, ranging from a pair of luminous eyes painted above the bar to lovely red clouds frothing around Ivy Lane's third level. Brooklyn-based artist N. Carlos J. was called upon to design all the interiors and says he wanted guests to feel as if they were leaving the high echelons of the neighborhood. "When you walk in, [I wanted it to be like] you were leaving yourself and entering into a new world," he says. "There's nothing like this on the Upper East Side."

Despite N. Carlos J.'s downtown-comes-uptown vibe, chef Sung Park keeps with his history of fine dining from Brasserie Seoul and Bistro Petit. The modern American fare contains flavors from his global travels and techniques from his French training. He prefers seasonal ingredients that feel light and aren't clogged with fat and butter.

Start, for example, with tuna and hamachi, deepened by a chilled yuzu broth, nori and wasabi olive oil. The wagyu beef tartare contains none of the traditional ketchup or breading but rather Asian pear and crispy rice paper.

During our interview, Park couldn't wait to describe the squid ink gnocchi, which he calls "an elevated mac and cheese." The squid ink, usually reserved for long

noodles such as fettuccine or tagliatelle, is the perfect background for a French Mornay cheese sauce, panko and chile powder, then elevated even further with a truffle add-on.

Park's menu includes a strong list of small plates, including bone marrow two ways (roasted marrow and as a croquette with preserved lemon) and baby octopus with sea bean, caper berry, chile puree

Clockwise from top: On the restaurant's third and highest level, artist N. Carlos J. painted the walls in an effect that he says many assume is wallpaper; the five contains Oloroso and Amontillado sherries, dark rum, oranges, lemon, pineapple and blackberry; chef Sung Park keeps the dessert menu light with treats such as a mango passion fruit finger.



IVY LANE

116 E. 60th St., ivylaneyc.com

Prices: Cocktails, \$16; small plates, \$9-\$29; larger plates, \$23-\$95

Hours: Tue.-Wed., 5PM-12AM
Thurs.-Sat., 5-11PM



PHOTO BY EDWARD HENNING/COURTESY OF IVY LANE





Clockwise from top: Artist N. Carlos J. made the bar area energetic, while the two upper levels are more relaxed; beef short rib is braised for 24 hours and presented with baby root vegetables and butternut squash puree; bacon-wrapped Cornish hen, served with heirloom carrots and two sauces.

and a saffron aioli. A burrata goes beyond the ordinary with a luscious ball of mozzarella and fig, but the best dish in this category has to be the seared Hudson Valley foie gras with cherry puree, roasted grape and brioche toast.

For the mains, a Colorado leg of lamb is unctuous with fresh pappardelle, an almond pesto and pecorino Romano. Cornish hen is perfectly roasted in bacon, alongside carrots and a poached egg, but the sauces, a sunchoke puree and chicken jus, are what really give this dish life.



Although the menu is heavy on the red meat, Sung puts just as much attention into his fish dishes. Fluke comes with crab brandade, a technique that usually is made with dried cod, and Park serves his Arctic char with four types of seasonal steamed mushrooms and a sake ginger Champagne sauce. He says, "It's a clear, consommé-type of saucy broth and then it also has mint in it. So it's pungent, light and sour."

His plating is meticulous with pops of color—the yellow of an egg yolk, the red of chile sauce—that mirror the street-art-style aesthetic of Ivy Lane. N. Carlos J. started designing the restaurant before Sung came onto the project, so the artwork might have influenced the cuisine. The artist, whom Park describes as a "modern-day Michelangelo," was given a lot of trust and freedom for the space after he designed a hotel that parent company Merchant Hospitality Group adored.

"People think of me as a muralist, painter or graphic designer, but designing spaces is the thing that I love the most," N. Carlos J. says. "I've never been given full control before this, so I've been waiting for this moment. I was ready." ■



What to Drink

The One is a strong contender for best drink with grapefruit vodka, St-Germain, Aperol, cordial and bubbly, but mixologist Wilmer Nolasco also developed a mean Old-Fashioned.

Where to Sit

A private room is completely decked out with art, but any seat in the trilevel space has art views.

How to Feast

Don't skip mouthwatering sides, especially sweet potato fries with smoked salt and housemade ketchup and aioli.

