

TABLES FOR TWO



COUVRON

508 Greenwich St. (212-966-6225)—In this still lonely area of West SoHo, where grunge (a U.P.S. shipping depot) co-exists with glamour (multimillion-dollar apartments), three adjoining restaurants, of which Couvron is the southernmost, seem to be huddling together for warmth. Like the neighborhood, Couvron has an appealingly motley heritage. Owned by the husband-and-wife team of Maura Jarach and the chef Tony Demes, it is named for the small town in Picardy where Jarach was born (she moved here, with her American parents, at the age of five). The couple ran a well-regarded restaurant of the same name in Portland, Oregon, for eight years but had an itch to get back to New York, and they opened Couvron last September. The place is not without its contradictions. Jarach doesn't stand on ceremony, greeting you in jeans and a long-sleeved black T-shirt, as if she had just come from a poetry reading at the Ear Inn, around the corner, and yet Demes's inventive menu is unambiguously high-end. The wine list, too, favors the kind of bottles that are out of reach for anyone working in a field in which the words "year-end bonus" are never heard. (Luckily, there is a wonderful and affordable selection of wines by the glass.)

Demes attended the Culinary Institute of America, and in the restaurant's offerings there is evidence not just of France and Oregon but also of those classroom kitchens—there is a peacockish strut and splendor to the dishes, as if the chef is saying to his teachers, "Look what I can do!" A delicately sweet peekytoe-crab-salad appetizer incorporates small beet and pear cubes topped by a mad scientist's cap of frisée; an earthier start to the meal is a creamy Hudson Valley foie gras on toasted brioche, with savory sauce and date purée. It is so rich that it almost has to be shared and so good that it should be. Some of the showmanship is less successful: the monkfish, which arrives shaped like a sushi roll and wrapped in bacon, is a little too firm for the arrangement, and doesn't cut pleasingly. The flavors work beautifully, though. You probably won't even notice the absence of salt and pepper shakers on the tables. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner. Entrées \$22-\$34.)

—Nancy Franklin

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