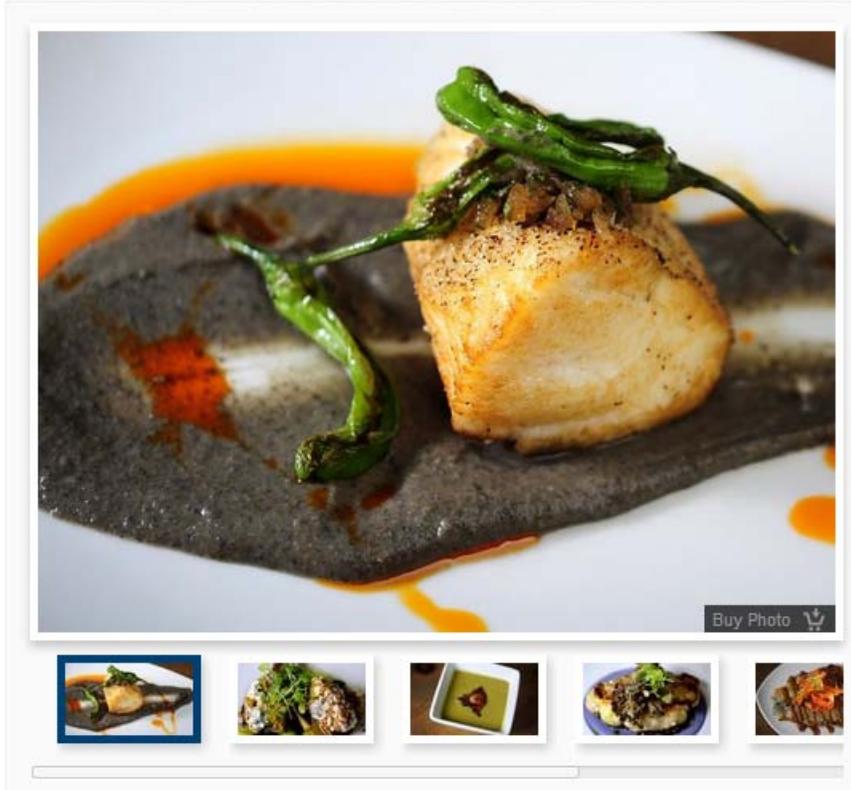


1808 Grille helps elevate city's fine dining

Nancy Vienneau, For The Tennessean

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"One good turn begets another" and "A rising tide lifts all ships." Both adages come to mind these days when thinking about the evolution of fine dining in Nashville. So many excellent restaurant choices! With palates educated and expectations elevated, we look forward to many more in the works.

Several hotels, conscious of this trajectory, have upped their game by incorporating local ingredients into the menu, showcasing more innovative cuisine. They wish to be embraced by locals as much as by visitors.

Related: [Chef Jake Strang returns to 1808 Grille](#)

At [Mason's](#) in Loews Vanderbilt Hotel, executive chef Brandon Frohne introduces a new menu in celebration of his one-year anniversary. Look for grilled cobia coated with chermoula spice, served with heirloom tomatoes, zucchini and spaetzle.

Long a champion of local food, chef Tyler Brown of the [Capitol Grille](#) at the Hermitage Hotel "hyper-sources" his ingredients. That means growing the vegetables on their Glen Levin urban farm, foraging chanterelles in the nearby countryside, and raising cattle on the hotel's own Double H Farms in Dickson County.

Since its opening in 2009, The Hutton's [1808 Grille](#) has maintained an overriding commitment to fresh, seasonal cooking. Here, farm-to-fork takes on modern American fare, imbued with global flavors.

And while there's been a major change at the 1808 — executive (and opening) chef Charles Phillips left to take a new position in the Caribbean, and his former sous chef Jacob "Jake" Strang returned from a stint in Pennsylvania to take over the helm — you would never know. All is seamless. The food is artfully plated and adroitly served in the posh, serene dining room.

Grand and casual

With its soaring two-story ceiling, contemporary chandeliers and central, twisted wood sculpture, the boutique hotel's dining room is grand in many ways, yet anchored in casual comfort. Earth tones, soft

lighting, impossibly comfortable leather banquettes and home appointments create a calm, urbane environment. Lunchtime feels open and airy. In the evening, the lights lower. At any time, it is conducive for conversation.

Service follows suit, attentive but unobtrusive. Dinner begins with the service of spiced flatbreads and a slender boat of olives marinated in rosemary, garlic and pimiento pepper strips. It's nice, light fare to spark the appetite, while you peruse the respectable wine list and cocktail selection. Ask your server for suggestions.

Small plates are ideal for sharing. Artichoke Burrata might first catch your eye, and it is a stunner. A long-stemmed young artichoke is grilled, split and stuffed with lemon-scented ricotta, painted with balsamic syrup and basil oil. Served chilled, it is right for fresh summer eating.

And, the bowl of basil gnocchi will draw you in, as well. Potato-based and pan-fried, the herbed spindles have a delicate crunch and soft interiors. Cubes of pancetta and a perfectly soft-cooked egg, broken to spill the yolk, finish the dish. For earthy-meaty tastes, the seared pork jowl in maple-syrup reduction is fatty and deeply flavored — just a bite with the corn fritter that accompanies.

Tradition remembered

Cauliflower has never been more creatively used than by today's chefs, and the 1808 Cauliflower Steak is an exceptional entrée, well-conceived and well-enjoyed — whether you are vegan or not. The grilled center-cut slab has toothsome caramel charring. Perched on a bed of red quinoa ringed by cauliflower puree (enhanced with coconut milk) it is topped with umami-filled oyster mushrooms.

Asian influences abound in two delectable choices "from the sea." Pan-fried trout is striped with Vietnamese chili sauce, imparting a pleasing medley of hot-sweet-sour tastes. Shaved carrots and cucumbers, like ribbons, crown the fillet. Scallops are cooked to the ideal amber sear, and placed in a pool of English pea puree, drizzled with port-yuzu vinaigrette.

Tastes do travel around the globe, but the 1808 Grille follows the Nashville meat-and-three tradition with its trio of complimentary side dishes accompanying entrees. These change daily. The evening's selection pleased everyone at the table: cremini mushrooms sautéed in thyme butter, Pennsylvania Dutch braised red cabbage and righteously spiced Jamaican rice and cowpeas.

Chef Strang will be rolling out his summer menu shortly, which will give fuller expression to his cooking style. But we believe that the evening's special, cold-smoked salmon with blackberry gastrique, gave evidence of exceptional things to come. The piece of fish was exquisite, gently but thoroughly smoked. A fork through its thin, crisp pan-sear finish yielded a butter-soft fillet. The tangy fruit sauce was a nice counterpoint both to the eyes and tongue.

We don't see chocolate malted desserts on many menus, so the special Chocolate Malted Mousse Sundae was deemed a must-have. Served in a pint-sized Mason jar (with long-handled spoons!), the layering of mousse, cream and chocolate-covered malted milk balls is one to share with a group. "It reminds me of a Three Musketeers candy bar," one guest remarked, "grown-up."

Nancy Vienneau is a chef and retired caterer with 25 years of experience. She cooks and teaches at Second Harvest and blogs about her adventures with food at <http://nancyvienneau.com>. Reviews are written from anonymous visits to restaurants. Negative reviews are based on two or more visits. The Tennessean pays for all meals.

If you go

1808 Grille at the Hutton Hotel
1808 West End Ave., Nashville

615-340-0012; www.1808grille.com

Hours: Dinner: 5:30-9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 5:30-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Breakfast: 6:30-10:30 a.m. daily. Lunch: 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday. Brunch: 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.

Reservations: accepted

Payment: major credit cards accepted

Alcohol: full bar

Food: Modern American

Cost: (Dinner) Small plates: \$8-\$10. Mid-course (soup/salad): \$5-\$9. Large plates: \$18-\$32. Dessert: \$7.

Parking: self-park or complimentary valet