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DINING

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

On Dining: All roads lead to your choice of appetizing dining options

By REBEKAH DENN  
P-I RESTAURANT CRITIC

We never used to know how to describe the angled streets coming together around 12th Avenue, East Madison, East Union and East Pike, but we've finally found the right word: appetizing.

First, the Twelfth and Madison development welcomed expanded versions of two excellent and very Seattle restaurants -- **Osteria La Spiga** and **Cafe Stellina** -- as tenants in the renovated Piston & Ring Building. Later this year, the owners of **Le Pichet** have a little cafe coming to the neighborhood. Next, look for cocktail, music, food and Americana at **Gun Club**, a lounge being developed by another city original -- Top Pot's Mark Klebeck.

Gun Club is being developed in the 42-unit Trace Lofts (1400 12th Ave.) across 12th Avenue from the Piston & Ring Building. Klebeck called Trace Lofts "a perfect fit for us" with its historic background, 21-foot ceilings and graceful woodwork. In a construction era of tear-downs and slap-ups, Klebeck liked that the developers were interested in the same blend of old and modern style that has been a hallmark of projects by Klebeck and his brother, Michael.

Gun Club is planned in the style of a midcentury Manhattan restaurant-bar, Klebeck said, the sort of elegant postwar place that once would have been tucked into a hotel, food and drinks at the ready and a jazz trio playing. For looks, the 1,600-square-foot space includes a "speakeasy" back door for residents of the Trace, a mahogany bar without a single straight edge, and a mezzanine mirroring its curves. The place is billed as incorporating "American cultural motifs that fuse old school and alternative scenes, ranging from the wild old West to '50s Las Vegas, from the Rat Pack to the Black Crowes."

Food will be on the casual side, Klebeck said, featuring updated twists on midcentury comfort meals. Also look for cocktails and a full bar specializing in aged whiskeys.

The project is not as much from the coffee-and-doughnuts route as it may seem, Klebeck said. All the brothers' projects, after all, have involved adding an updated twist and a Seattle flavor to the well-known. And if they can glamorize a doughnut, why not meat loaf and mashed potatoes?

"It's all Americana," he said.

The name is partly a nostalgic nod to the gun clubs once found in many rural communities, partly a reference to the '80s punk band, Gun Club.

Intrigued? Gun Club isn't expected to open in lounge form until January, but before that the Klebeck-designed space will be used as the "buyer's information lounge" for people interested in the lofts. That will open in April. More information online at [tracelofts.com](http://tracelofts.com).

Time for Tavolata

It's here! **Tavolata** (2323 Second Ave.), the Italian

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restaurant from Union chef-owner Ethan Stowell and former Tom Douglas pastry chef Patric Gabre-Kidan, is open for business after months of planning, permits and construction work. It's not only open, but open a *lot* -- 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. daily.

The initial menu includes the rustic-revisited likes of minestrone with guanciale (\$8); spaghetti with anchovies, garlic and red chili (\$12); manicotti with oxtails, thyme and orange (\$14); agnolotti with veal brains, brown butter and sage (\$15); and a roasted pork chop and polenta that serves two (\$22). For dessert, we're going to try the "zeppole" (lemon doughnuts and powdered sugar, \$7). Pastas are made in-house from machines imported from Italy. As soon as the back-ordered wheat grinder comes through, they'll be making their own flour on site as well, using durum wheat grown in Oregon.

"Going through a buildup of a space that had no gas, no electricity, no nothing, is definitely a choice I'm not sure I want to make again," Stowell said, but he thinks the results look great. "It's like no other restaurant in town, I think. It's really softly lit, it's got a very cool mix of modern but rustic style. For me it would be a great place to go after work and hang out and have something to eat, and that was the goal."

Stowell has been starting his days at Union, where Jason Stoneburner heads up the kitchen with sous chef Tyler Moritz. Then he switches over to Tavolata, where the chef de cuisine is Randy Whiteford, formerly of Campagne. At Tavolata, "I'm a line cook," Stowell said. And he's serious -- you can find him working the pasta station.

"I like working a station," he said. "... I'm used to managing an entire restaurant from the kitchen." Gabre-Kidan is Tavolata's general manager. No Web site yet, but call for information at 206-838-8008.

### Sweet absolution

Cheesecake is already a guilty pleasure, but what to do with a slogan like this: "Forgive me, chocolate, for I have sinned. I have not yet had my daily confection."

The line comes from Paul Verano, the cheerful chocolate fanatic who serves as creator/baker of **The Confectional** (1530 Pike Place), a new bakery in Pike Place Market. The place specializes in cheesecakes, using a recipe Verano always made for friends in Seattle and then expanded into a business when he and his partner moved to New Zealand.

"Our friends said, 'Paul, we have nothing like this here. You have to start a business.' They were serious!"

The Confectional gained a popular audience in Wellington, then Verano returned to the Northwest a year ago for family reasons and set out to open a Seattle spot specializing in ingredients that are as natural as he can get. Verano said he uses biscuits from Spain for his cheesecake crusts, rather than graham crackers with hydrogenated oils. Eggs are from cage-free hens, and most flavors are natural -- an exception being the Creamsicle, for which he uses a natural orange plus artificial reinforcement.

"I really need to punch it and make it taste like the ice cream we had as kids," Verano said.

Cheesecakes are available in individual rounds as well as full-size cakes. Other specialties include cheesecake truffles, imported chocolate bars from New Zealand and a drink of spiced Colombian hot chocolate, "a proper European-style drinking chocolate" some customers take home to

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OUR AFFILIATES









warm up as an ice cream sauce.

The bakery is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

### Fare Start cart exits

After reading our recent nod to the new headquarters and fabulous dinner fundraisers at Fare Start, the non-profit that provides culinary training and other services to the homeless, a reader inquired about the whereabouts of the coffee and sandwiches cart the organization once ran in Central Library. It was staffed and run through Fare Start's barista program from the library's 2004 opening until December.

"It was a valuable training site for Fare Start's barista program for the year and a half it operated and provided great exposure for Fare Start as an organization," Fare Start's Karla Smith-Jones wrote in an e-mail. "Unfortunately, although the coffee cart was tried at different locations in the library, business just didn't ever pick up. Fare Start opted to not renew the contract with the library when the contract was up."

Library spokeswoman Andra Addison said the hope is to bring good coffee and sandwiches back to Central Library, which soon will be accepting proposals from other vendors.

### See you in summer

Now, more personal news: I'm taking a temporary break from the P-I for an upcoming family leave. Leslie Kelly, former restaurant critic for the Spokesman-Review in Spokane and most recently for the Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tenn., will be filling in with dining news and restaurant reviews during my leave, joining food editor Hsiao-Ching Chou and reporter-critic Kristin Dizon on our food team.

My review of Osteria La Spiga will run Feb. 9. After that, I'll enjoy reading Leslie Kelly's take on our food scene. Eat well, and I'll look forward to joining you again in the summer.

**P-I restaurant critic Rebekah Denn can be reached at 206-448-8190 or [rebekahdenn@seattlepi.com](mailto:rebekahdenn@seattlepi.com).**



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