

New Religion

The reincarnation of Buggs Temple's top floor has preserved what worked and spiced a few things up.

BY BETH A. CLAYTON



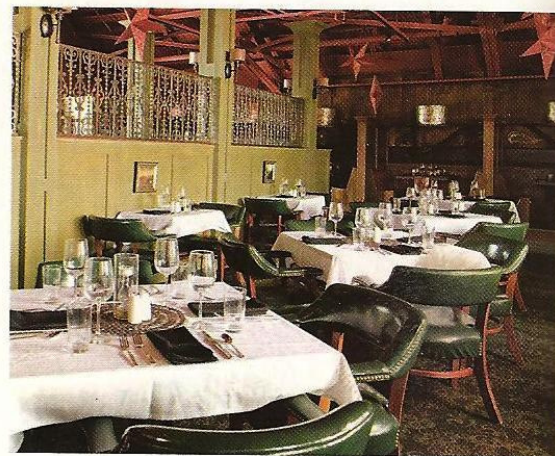
Tuna Wonton

Despite its efforts to stay hidden—only a small banner out front and an obscure Web address—we found Euphoria on the top floor of Buggs Temple. Unfortunately, few others did. Only a sprinkling of couples nestled in the booths during the Saturday-night dinner rush, but they were in for a treat.

Many remember the predecessor to Euphoria, the highly anticipated Tavern at the Temple, which benefited from chef Brad Gates's culinary expertise but suffered from lackluster service. It shuttered its doors last September, less than a year after opening. Lynn Shepherd, Sandy Schimmel, and Amy Hornsby, the team behind Creation Cafe on the Temple's lower floor, then purchased the space and overhauled the interior. Gone are the dull brown tablecloths that darkened the dining room despite its 35-foot ceilings and south-facing view of the Central Canal.

Fortunately, the new owners retained Gates—a veteran of New York's Union Square Cafe and Britney Spears' Nyla—as head chef, and turned him loose to spiff up the menu. Some standbys held on, like the suckling pig, but other items got a makeover. The Niman Ranch beef tenderloin, seared just on one side, now sits on a bed of traditional Italian puttanesca instead of the chanterelle risotto. Another update is the house Manhattan, mixed with bacon-infused Maker's Mark—ideal for those who already miss the smell of applewood smoke that used to permeate the building. A smoky-sweet depth is added to the liquor through a hush-hush, in-house process in which bacon fat is mixed with the bourbon to infuse it with a grilled flavor and then filtered out again.

In addition to sprucing up the seasonally changing menu, Gates also brought back the cheese course: more than 30 different cheeses with some notables, like the five-year extra-aged Gouda and the Gorgonzola dolce.



But the harried service that blemished Tavern at the Temple's record could continue to be a problem for Euphoria. It took several minutes for anyone to acknowledge us at the door, despite the mostly empty dining room, and a drink order (who could stop at one Manhattan?) nearly went forgotten. But it won't be enough to keep us away: Our waiter was friendly and enthusiastic, offering well-informed asides about Gates's creations and pointing out not-to-be-missed dishes. We'll be back for seconds; here's hoping some more people join us. ●