Maison Premier Has 20 $1 Oysters, Nawlins Flair: Review

By Ryan Sutton - Nov 14, 2012 12:01 AM ET

When superstorm Sandy shut down so many New York restaurants, Maison Premier in Brooklyn picked up the gauntlet by shocking oysters and shaking up a drink called the Hurricane.

The $13 lobster thermidor is a mix of rum, passion fruit and lemon juice, served over crushed ice and easily consumed in 60 seconds flat. It tastes and smells like anywhere but Gotham, which is far enough, because this newly two-year-old Williamsburg spot takes much of its inspiration from the vibrant cocktail culture and French-inflected cuisine of New Orleans.

Those folks know how to deal with a Category 1. So it's fitting that Maison Premier kept its door open. And it's why this unofficial Gulf Coast ambassador is the first restaurant I'm choosing to review since the biggest storm in a generation ravaged our city.

Most of the seats are bar seats and lack lumber support or cushioning. Mustaches abound. So do suspenders. And candles, which permit you to read the menu in studied darkness. Do they even need power here?

Killer Carbs

Maison Premier smells of high-tide and horseradish. The reservations policy is walk-ins, except for large parties. No entrees, only small plates and shellfish towers. The most filling dish is the bread basket, and you have to pay for it.

A bow-tied waiter brings you the killer carbs: Salt-and-pepper brioche, focaccia, an olive roll and a baguette. A cloud of steary and yeast assaulsts your senses. Butter, perfectly tempered, is fortified with seaweed that tastes like expensive caviar. The basket's a steal for $3.

Time for oysters, which cost a buck each from 4-7 p.m., not a bad deal considering a dozen will easily run you $36 elsewhere.

There are 33 varieties at Maison, most of them available every day, so here are a few quick tasting notes. They're cleanly shocked, with nary a popped belly or fragment of shell.

You can mix and match giant Belons ($4.95), Blue Points ($2.55), rare buttery Oyster Bay ($2.55), cucumbery Tottens ($2.55) and creamy Conway Cups ($2.65).

How about bay scallops with lemongrass? Sure. Chef Jared Stafford-Hill has a knack for pairing raw fish with off-the-beaten-track flavors. His fine crudo recalls the early work of Esco's David Pasternack.

Apple Clams

So don't balk at razor clams with apple; the fruit mimics the sweetness of the mollusk. And don't shy away from the geoduck clam, shaved so thin it takes on the texture of fennel. Crab, served in its shell, is garnished with bits of sweet peppers and rouille, a jambalaya fish salad of sorts.

Big Easy boosters might want to pair this all with an excellent rum Sazerac, but the better call is a glass of bright, bubbly Delamotte Brut Champagne ($18).

Move on to the warm plates. Fine leak and potato soup ($16) is gilded with a few butter-poached oysters; the hot Vichyssoise becomes sublime with truffles, added sometimes generously, sometimes not.

There are oddly satisfying surf-and-turfs: octopus and pig's head terrine ($16), sea scallops with foie gras mousse ($17). Best of all are langoustines with sweeetbreads ($18), both hearty elements sharing the same silky texture.

Turbot ($18) flakes into whatever sauce this flatfish is paired with, in this case a fine gash of chanterelle veloute. Seafood risotto ($17), in turn, is gumbo in fancy pants; the sticky rice is studded with bits of crawfish and sweet bay scallops. Stir in sea urchin for even greater depth of flavor.

Things might be getting loud by now. This is when you order your final alcoholic concoction, a babe au rum that tastes like a lot of the namesake spirit.

Rating: **½/2 (1/2 star dropped because of those chairs and the noise)

The Bloomberg Questions

Price: Most dishes under $20.

Sound Level: 70-80 decibels: boisterous.

Date Place: Cramped seats work in your favor here.

Special Feature: Open until 4 a.m.

Inside Tip: No need to try the tasting menu.

Back on My Own Dime: Frequently during happy hour.