




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

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


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QUEUE



When superstorm Sandy shut down so many [New York](#) restaurants, Maison Premiere in [Brooklyn](#) picked up the gauntlet by shucking oysters and shaking up a drink called the Hurricane.

The \$13 libation of defiance 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 fair enough, because this nearly two-year-old Williamsburg spot takes much of its inspiration from the vibrant cocktail culture and French-inflected cuisine of [New Orleans](#).

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Chef Jared Stafford-Hill at Williamsburg's Maison Premiere. Stafford-Hill oversees a menu of excellent raw fish and small plates. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

Those folks know how to deal with a Category 1. So it's fitting that [Maison Premiere](#) 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 lumbar 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 Premiere 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 stear and yeast assaults 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 shucked, 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 Bays (\$2.55), cucumber 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 Esca's David Pasternack.

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An interior view of the front bar, with an absinthe drip in center, at Maison Premiere. The best time to visit is during happy hour, where oysters are \$1 apiece. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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A gumbo-like seafood risotto is made with Vialone Nano rice, shellfish stock, scallop roe butter, maine sea urchin Nantucket Bay scallops and California crayfish. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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Langoustines with sweetbreads at Maison Premiere. The silky texture of the crustacean and organ meat mimic each other perfectly. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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 boozers 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 leek 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 sweetbreads (\$18), both heady 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 baba au rum that tastes like a lot of the namesake spirit.

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

The Bloomberg Questions

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A variety of oysters on a bed of ice at Maison Premiere. The restaurant offers 33 different types of oysters. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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Paddle fish caviar on a plate for crudo tasting at Maison Premiere. Chef Stafford-Hill makes an excellent case for the soft roe, which he serves smoked atop arctic char. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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The Hurricane cocktail gets a head of egg foam. The drink offers an escape from Hurricane Sandy's woes. Photographer: Philip Lewis/Bloomberg

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.

Maison Premiere is at 298 Bedford Ave. Information: +1-347- 335-0446 or <http://maisonpremiere.com>.