



Ooh La La!

By Martin Gravely

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Can Can hits the mark in Carytown

According to my French dictionary, *brasserie* means *brewery*, *restaurant* or *lunchroom*. Well, the recently opened Can Can Brasserie isn't a brewery (nor are there any high-kicking dancers, in case you were wondering), but it is just about everything else food- and beverage-related you can imagine — a restaurant, raw bar, patisserie, boulangerie, coffeehouse, breakfast spot and late-night bar destination. *Mon dieu!*

Behind this tremendous undertaking is proprietor and executive chef Chris Ripp — part of a family that owns such local eateries as Havana '59, Vie de France and numerous Arby's locations. Perhaps more important than his lineage, though, are Ripp's former experiences as a Parisian resident, a Culinary Institute of America graduate, and a chef at such well-known New York City restaurants as Gramercy Tavern and Jean-Georges.

Feeding off its bustling Carytown environs, Can Can is hip and fresh, buzzing with a palpable energy reminiscent of Parisian eateries I've visited.

My solo lunch visit included sampling pear and cauliflower soup (\$5) and a braised-pork sandwich (\$9). The smooth puréed soup offered a subtle, most appealing blend of its signature ingredients, along with a topping of chopped walnuts. Prepared on house-made apple Normandy bread, the sandwich offered chunks of tender pork and slatherings of both caramelized onion-apple jam and whole-grain Dijon mustard.

For dinner a few nights later, my friend Mary and I began by ordering the poached leeks with truffle vinaigrette (\$9) and a wild-mushroom and duck tart (\$10). The leek whites were pleasantly firm, mellow and satisfying, but we would have appreciated more flavor from the vinaigrette. The tart's rustic crust was stuffed with braised-duck confit, chanterelle and black-trumpet mushrooms, and finely diced carrot, onion, celery and potato. Fresh frisée and a reduced apple-cider vinaigrette served as toppers with this delicious appetizer.

As entrées, we selected sole meunière (\$18) and rabbit moutarde (\$19). The former was a light, savory offering of petite, pan-seared fish filets, baby new potatoes, wilted spinach, and an intensely flavored lemon and white-wine sauce. The rabbit, served with whole baby carrots and lightly roasted fingerling potatoes, delivered both leg and tenderloin cuts of meat. Accents included broth-like rabbit jus and yet more mustard (much less, though, than the dish's name might imply). The dark meat, we found, was considerably juicier than the white.

Mary's fluffy chocolate mousse (\$7.50) — piped into a decorative génoise cake tower and paired with rich, house-made caramel ice cream and chocolate sauce — was as attractive as it was delicious. The golden crust of my almond tart (\$8) was chock-full of toasted, slivered almonds and almond paste. Ginger ice cream (again, house-made) added an appealing "bite" and adeptly

contrasted the sweetness of both the tart and its accenting dollops of mango chutney. It was divine.

Can Can offers so much that even after two visits, I've only scratched the surface of this brasserie. But I must say, I'm dying to scratch some more.

Can Can Brasserie

3120 W. Cary St. (in Cary Court Shopping Center)
358-7274



Price Ranges

Lunch: Soups and salads \$5 to \$12. Tartines and sandwiches \$8.50 to \$11. Raw bar \$2 to market price. Entrées \$12 to \$15. Desserts \$6.50 to \$7.50.

Dinner: Soups and appetizers \$2.50 to \$12. Raw bar \$2 to \$75. Entrées \$9.50 to \$22. Desserts \$7.50 to \$10.

Hours

A coffeehouse selection of items is offered every day from 7 a.m. through the afternoon. Lunch is served Monday to Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. (pared-down menu until 5 p.m.). Dinner is served Monday to Thursday, 5 to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 5 to 11 p.m., and Sunday, 5 p.m. 'til (pared-down menu after 11 p.m. every night). Breakfast is served on Saturdays, and brunch on Sundays.