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the restaurant  
review

dining out in new york city

## An Apple a Day

by Jeff Harris



COURTESY OF BRAEBURN

**Braeburn** 117 Perry St, 212-255-0696

Price range: \$35-50 Rating: **★★★★**

Chef Brian Bistrong, formerly of The Harrison, decided he was done making money for someone else and opened his own restaurant at the corner of a leafy West Village block. The dining room is dominated by a watercolor of the owner's orchard, where he grows the eponymous Braeburn apples that also appear on the menu. The air is redolent with French-inflected seasonal fare, perfect for the coming months, though the noise level rises precipitously when busy.

Braeburn's menu is sparse: six entrees and one special, but I like this style. It signifies the chef's confidence in each item and allows for consistency from the kitchen. A warm-smoked local brook trout (\$10) demonstrates this. The only fish appetizer, it achieves a harmony sure to please any pescatarian, occupying a toothsome space between cooked, smoked and raw. Similarly, simple medium-rare sea scallops, crosshatched before searing, paired with a demure walnut puree and clas-

sic braised endive, showed the care such a small menu can inspire. A quail sausage appetizer was perhaps the best of the lot — though I am a confirmed game lover. Instead of a classic sausage using ground quail, the casing housed a whole deboned quail, a much simpler way to eat this tiny bird while keeping the varieties of texture and flavor recognizable, aided by figs, quinoa and yogurt.

Pennsylvania chicken (\$26) was the lowlight of the evening — but only because it wasn't outstanding. The flavors were spot on, especially an earthy, buttery chanterelle sauce (and a flute of dry alcoholic cider from the wide-ranging wine list), but the bird itself was overcooked. I rarely order chicken out, but the few fine restaurants that dare to serve roast chicken (just a breast in this case, though they have a whole bird special once a week) sometimes create magic, with no gummy, shredding flesh, no sticky teeth — the crucible of a restaurant kitchen. This wasn't one of those times. Also queerly lacking was any starch, but it being days after Thanksgiving, that was probably for the best. A side of Brussels sprout leaves was nice and crunchy, with farm-fresh flavors shining through.

To prepare for the cold night and a walk past the partying masses at the nearby Spotted Pig, we lingered over cups of Braeburn's hot chocolate (\$6): spicy, chocolatey, just sweet enough, and accompanied by a homemade toasted marshmallow, it's easily one of the best cups in town. Fortified with chocolate and timeless (if a bit heavy) cookery, we braved the Village chill, secure and empowered with the knowledge that we would make the same cold walk again soon, in anticipation.

For questions and comments, the writer can be reached at editor@thelmagazine.com

★★★★ Manna   ★★★★ Pretty damn good   ★★★ Fine but flawed   ★★ Better than starving   ★ No, never again