

PRICE \$4.99

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TABLES FOR TWO BRAEBURN



117 Perry St., at Greenwich St. (212-255-0696)—The Braeburn apple sprang from a chance seedling, but the Braeburn in the West Village exudes careful cultivation. The restaurant's lines are both modern and rustic—sleek teardrop light fixtures appeal to the urbanite, alder-wood branches in the window to the ruralist. The bar area is done in dark wood, pussy willows fill a great vase, and waitstaff wear plaid shirts. The over-all effect is that of a highly sanitized farmhouse, and yet, for all the contrivance, the place comes by it honestly: the chef, Brian Bistrong, once worked on a farm in New Jersey; a painting of his pastoral home in Connecticut hangs on a wall. Still, the city can't help but intrude: on a recent evening, the dim room was pierced by the strobe of a police car's lights outside. "This is a busy corner," the bartender said. "They pull someone over every night."

Bistrong, who most recently was the chef at the Harrison, concentrates on simple, hearty fare: a thick sirloin steak, a nicely roasted chicken (birthplace: Pennsylvania). Above all, there's an attitude of respect—for the diner, for the cooks, for the ingredients. "I believe in saying hello and goodbye," Bistrong once told the *Times*. "It shows

you care, not just about being in the kitchen, but about the people you're working with." Unfortunately, sometimes respect can feel a lot like restraint. The duck breast, for instance, was perfectly cooked, succulent without being indulgently fatty, and surrounded by shredded Brussels sprouts. You'd be hard pressed, though, to remember the dish the next day. A rack of pork was notable for its sheer size, but there was little to distinguish it from any other mammoth piece of pig. Occasionally, a dish will break out, in one direction or another. The other night, the crab salad achieved the dubious distinction, thanks to a passion-fruit sauce, of cloying, lingering sweetness. The cod, on the other hand, was accompanied beautifully by a vivid onion-bonito broth and bright-green bok choy. Bistrong seems to approach his restaurant with a farmer's self-effacing competence; but, for the price, and with a chef who has proved his mettle elsewhere, you want a little more big-city braggadocio. (Open weekdays for dinner, and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées \$22-\$32.)

—Andrea Thompson