

# Newsday

Friday, November 3, 2006

## CITY BITES

### Cheese and other reasons to smile

#### PICHOLINE

35 W. 64th St.  
Manhattan  
212-724-8585

**CUISINE:** Mediterranean, refined and redefined

**CHECK:** Dinner, \$64 for two courses, each additional course, \$14; cheese course, \$18; tasting menu, \$115.

**HOURS:** Lunch, Saturday, 11:45 a.m. to 2 p.m.; dinner, Monday to Wednesday, 5 to 10 p.m., Thursday to Saturday, 5 to 11:45 p.m., Sunday, 5 to 9 p.m.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Rest rooms downstairs and they're not accessible

BY JOAN REMINICK  
STAFF WRITER

Before we even set foot in Picholine, the stage was set. I had phoned to book a table and the reservationist kindly asked about time constraints and special needs. I told her we had a concert to make and that my son, who was joining us, was a vegetarian. "I'll make note," she said, suggesting for him a duck-free version of a duck and wild

mushroom risotto.

That risotto, in fact, turned out to be a revelation — lush, creamy, heady with black truffle butter and wild mushrooms, dotted with jewel-like bits of butternut squash, each grain yielding slightly beneath the tooth.

But I get ahead of myself. What brought us to Picholine, besides its proximity to Lincoln Center, was the news that the place had recently undergone a major face-lift and launched a new \$64 two-course menu (with a cheese course running \$18 extra). Long known as a magnet for cheese connoisseurs (chef-owner Terrance Brennan also owns Artisanal Fromagerie, Bistro & Wine Bar), Picholine now features a plush wine and cheese bar up front. Dining rooms have shed their formal stiffness for a softer look.

An elegantly plated amuse bouche quartet opened our meal: Highlights included a cool cucumber and cumin soup and a sprightly ceviche. A first course of warm buffalo carpaccio was dressed with a pomegranate vinaigrette, its tart seeds accenting the meat's soft richness. I could not keep my

spoon out of my husband's autumnal pumpkin bisque, which had, at its center, cranberry relish crowned with cranberry foam. While a pasta course of sheep's milk ricotta gnocchi with chanterelles and parsley pistou had an appealing lushness, I thought it could have done without the addition of Gulf shrimp, which somehow gilded the lily.

I was much more enamored of an entree of rare venison with a sumptuousness played up by a tart berry-studded huckleberry jus. Sharing the plate was a mound of deliciously light whipped parsnips and wedges of French toast-like "pain perdu."

Wild Scottish mallard with toasted gingerbread crust, however, was heavy-tasting, as was the foie gras and duck leg crêpinette, shaped like a burger and served alongside. Better was an entree of sea scallops with blood orange sauce and cauliflower, a lilting combination.

In place of dessert, one member of our group ordered a cheese course, selecting four hand-crafted cheeses from a cart tended by maitre fromager Max McCalman. Along with a wood



NEWSDAY PHOTO / BRUCE GILBERT

**Chef de cuisine Craig Hopson, left, and chef-owner Terrance Brennan have launched a \$64 two-course menu, with an \$18 cheese-course option.**

board of carefully arranged cheeses came baskets of sliced baguette, some fruit and chutney. A personal favorite was Caprino noce, a lovely Italian goat-milk cheese.

Pumpkin tart with walnut

crumble and cranberry crisp sounded nothing like what actually arrived: an airy coral-hued mousse atop a meltingly light cookie-like crust, a transparent sheet of red on one side, some walnuts on the other. Nobody was complaining. A loaf-shaped warm caramel apple brioche melted on the tongue; its ideal foil was a dollop of salted caramel ice cream.

Dinner ended in a flurry of gratis petits fours and assorted chocolates. We carried out a packet of miniature cookies, along with the sense of having been well cared-for.

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If you like Picholine, you also may like: **Cafe Boulud**, 20 E. 76th St., Manhattan, 212-772-2600  
**Artisanal**, 2 Park Ave. Manhattan, 212-725-8585

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