

Paris to Portland in the Pearl

French brasserie Fenouil brings the City of Light to the City of Roses

BY KERRY NEWBERRY

Writer and bon vivant Ernest Hemmingway once penned, “If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.”

Pascal Chureau, executive chef and owner of Fenouil (fennel in French), not only substantiates Hemmingway’s poetic words with his Portland restaurant, but has lived them since he was a small child.

Born in Tours, a small town in the heart of the Loire Valley, and raised in Bordeaux, Chureau was a culinary phenomenon in his early years. He enrolled in the École Hôtelière de Bordeaux at the age of 16.

Following an intensive two-year program with an emphasis on French, Italian and Mediterranean cuisine, he worked in Paris as a sous chef for La Maison du Dannemark, Le Grenadin and Café St. Honoré—all three-star Michelin Guide restaurants.

In 2005, he took his knowledge and experience to the other side of the big pond with Fenouil (pronounced feh nOY), a 250-seat Francophile haven, located in the poetic part of Portland’s Pearl district, overlooking the urban oasis of Jamison Square.

Chureau describes his restaurant as “an urban brasserie in the Parisian tradition,” but for many diners, Fenouil is much more than that. It’s a trip to Paris.

The sophisticated fare, along with a bustling tableau of urbanites young and old sauntering by, local denizens playing in a cascading, desert-colored fountain or pairs on park benches in idyllic repose, ensure an enchanting affair.

For a taste à Paris from the bistro menu, try the *Boeuf Bourguignon*, braised Kobe beef with red wine, wild

mushrooms, bacon and pearl onion (\$14) or *Pétoncles au Fenouil*, steamed clams, fennel, a dash of Pastis, sopresata, mint and cilantro (\$10), paired with a side of *Frites à l’Huile de Truffes*, truffle oil french fries (\$6). Ooh-la-la! To add a bite with homegrown flair, try the *Champignons Sauvages*, foraged Oregon mushrooms (\$7).

Once winter takes hold and dining hearthside beckons to your rain-soaked



Executive chef and proprietor Pascal Chureau opened French brasserie Fenouil in 2005. Photo provided.

soul, know a double-sided fireplace greets gourmets at the door. Topping this fireside mantle is a stoic Gallic Rooster (Coq Gaulois), the French national emblem.

More château décor than cottage, a winding wrought-iron staircase swirls to a top mezzanine level for savoir-faire dining, while the tables downstairs provide a view of chefs in crisp white linens deftly preparing culinary delights in the open kitchen.

Soft earth tones, accentuated by striking limestone columns, grace the restaurant, all softly set aglow by a sprinkling of tealights and Old World lanterns on sandstone-toned walls. Simple, yet storied-looking chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling, reminiscent of castle days from long ago.

Dishes from the “petit plats” (small plates) portion of the dinner menu taste of tradition fused with modern: *Cuisses de Grenouilles*, fried frog legs and bagna cauda (\$12.50), *Escargots de Bourgogne*, baked snails in garlic-almond butter (\$13) or the *Steak Tartare*, Kobe beef tartare with quail egg and brioche (\$13.50).

Opposite the dining room, in the bar area, clusters of tables and circular booths taper from a slate gray marble bar sourced from a local quarry. Here imbibers can select from a book of wines spanning every region in France, sample a trio of spirits (flights of bourbon, French or Italian digestifs, Ports, Chartreuse or Armagnac) and even indulge in a serving of King Louis the XIII, the king of Cognacs. Though the bottle sells for \$1,600 or more, one serving is a mere \$198.

Whether you warm your soul through spirits or fireside, autumn is an ideal time to journey to France via Fenouil.

“This time of year always reminds me of home, harvest and crush were important times for the community,” said Chureau. “Fenouil allows me to celebrate the farmers and vintners by presenting the fruits of their labors.”

Fenouil: An Urban French Brasserie is located at 900 N.W. 11th Avenue. It is open for lunch, Monday through



The interior of Fenouil is elegant and refined with Parisian charm. Photo provided.

Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dinner begins at 5, seven nights a week, and Sunday brunch is served from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information and reservations call 503-525-2225 or visit www.fenouilinthepearl.com. ♦

Kerry Newberry is a Pinot-sipping food and wine writer in Portland.

Once upon a time...

In the 1970s, Oregon Pinot Noir had her debut and the sippers were smitten (even the French ones). It’s a day many Oregon oenophiles recount with pride and a pivotal moment in the history of this noble, beguiling grape. In 1979, an Eyrie Vineyards 1975 South Block Pinot Noir tasted to international acclaim against Burgundy’s best in the Parisian “wine olympics” and the following year in Beaune. Thereafter, more European wine drinkers knew there was a state somewhere called Oregon and more vintner dreamers joined the early pioneers to grow and craft Oregon Pinot Noir.

Tantalize your taste buds

during a harvest celebration at Fenouil: **Pinot Holds Barred, Oct. 25, at 7 p.m.** Artisan French and Oregon wines (from Bergström Winery) will be paired with a five-course autumn feast. The cost is \$90 per person, and seating is limited. For reservations call 503-525-2225.

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