



Get informed. Go to  
**inside RA.com**

Helpful tools and information for  
people with rheumatoid arthritis.



Sign up  
and receive  
a brochure  
about RA



## Dinner Belle: What Bleu does well, it does very well; skip the rest

The Dinner Belle can be reached at [dinnerbelle@wsjournal.com](mailto:dinnerbelle@wsjournal.com).  
Winston-Salem Journal  
Thursday, March 22, 2007

"Where are we going? What is it called?" a friend asked me a few weeks ago. "Blah?"

"No, Bleu ... bbbllleeeuuu ... blue, in French. It's near Hanes Mall."

"Huh," he answered, a polite nonresponse.

If you've never been to a certain new-ish restaurant, it's easy to feel a little put off by the idea that this is where you'll spend your evening. First, there's the name - not Blue, but its French cousin, Bleu -- and unfortunately, if you pronounce it the way *Les Francais* do, it comes out sounding stuffy and silly. The menu roams all over the map, far from France.

So why not just call the restaurant Blue?

Second, there's the location. The bright lights and traffic of Hanes Mall Boulevard are not what I think of when I am looking for good food.

What a wake-up call.

It began with a fluffy little dish of mascarpone. Shot through with lemon sunshine and fennel, it melts sweetly on your tongue. It is ridiculously good slathered on the thin slices of crusty raisin-nut bread. It could be a dessert. It's a third of a trio of dips. Order it. And ask for more bread. In addition to the mascarpone, there is a bowl of preserved tomato pureed with leeks, and another of red peppers, spinach and ricotta. They come with the raisin bread, and a good, warm, very thin baguette, pre-sliced into crusty half-moons.

Other appetizers are almost as good: tempura shrimp, encased in a perfect, airy envelope, with a springlike green-tomato dipping sauce, sprinkled with black and white sesame seeds; a smoked-chicken- and-crawfish spring roll with a side of peppery mayonnaise.

But for every exotic dish, comfort food is what Bleu excels at. Not the sandwich and burger variety, but simple, Sunday sort of suppers: frothy sweet corn bisque, peanut-butter mousse pie robed in thick ganache and a chocolate cookie crust, leafy greens mixed with candied walnuts, blue cheese and poached, winy apples. The clincher was nearly perfect roast chicken, juicy inside and tanned and crispy on the outside, the breast meat sliced and fanned over a pile of mashed potatoes, mushrooms and baby corn.

Not everything is so homey. Even if the service is prompt and the food hot, the bread in the bread basket may be hard and cold, or worse, soggy. There's the usual flat-screen television in the bar, totally out of place in a restaurant that should care more about what people are eating, not what they are watching.

Bleu itself is not - not blue, that is, not really. The wait staff's shirts are a calming shade of indigo, but the rest of the place is painted with a rich palate of chocolates, golds and tans. A long, plush suede banquette fills a waiting nook across from the hostesses' stand. The soaring ceilings, wood trim, cloth-covered Edison-era filament bulbs and abstract chandeliers, covered with large translucent discs

that looked like circles of caramel candy. It felt like eating in an old lighthouse, perhaps crossed with a Japanese paper house. The music can be the canned, corporate sort you'd probably hear at those chains down the street, but otherwise, Bleu is a kind of unexpected rest stop on the edge of a lot of hustle and bustle.

There are sandwiches on the menu, and pasta, too, but I wasn't bowled over by any of them. The steak frites are not really steak frites - they're the usual fries. Bleu does a better job than most area restaurants at making vegetarians feel like they are more than an afterthought, but the brie, arugula and caramelized onion sandwich comes on a limp hamburger bun. Duck bolognese sounds good, and spaghetti carbonara too (that's comfort food), but we tried the seafood papperdelle - salmon, mussels and shrimp wound through thick ribbons of pasta, and it tasted suspiciously fishy, as in, not very fresh.

The sandwiches themselves seem like an afterthought. I wish Bleu would just put its energies into its entrees. The kitchen is particularly innovative at mingling sweet and savory. A plate of big, tender scallops and creamy cheese orzo (which, to be honest, needed a little salt) is dotted with golden raisins. The duck breast is fine on its own; what makes the dish is that it is laid over a delicious bed of pureed parsnips, dotted with kumquats, which look like oval, orange jewels.

To finish, there's the peanut-butter pie. And white-chocolate creme brulee comes with a nice, thick lid, but the chocolate torte was too solid, nearly frozen, and the tiramisu safe but a little boring. Bleu's menu feels heavily winter right now, wearing a wool sweater and littered with root vegetables and short ribs. The kitchen seems to think seasonally, so why isn't there at least one citrus dessert?

So ... Bleu. Try to overlook the name, even if the hefty menu includes a short list of the restaurant's bottled water offerings (commonplace in the big city, not so much 'round these parts). It's a simple and fine plate of roasted chicken that won me over, in any case.