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# Diner's Journal

By RUTH REICHL

You know by looking at the dining room that the Tonic is an attractive new restaurant. But reading brings you more useful information. It takes only a glance at the menu to realize that the chef has a varied American background and favors strong flavors. And even a cursory reading of the wine list tells you that the person who put it together has very good contacts.

It is all true. The chef, Chris Gesualdi, was most recently at Montrachet, but before that he worked at Aurora, Le Bernardin and Rakel. He has put together a menu that uses all his knowledge: appetizers include a fine pumpkin bisque with mussels, bacon and saffron; warm apple-smoked salmon with oysters, caviar and caper sauce, and a powerful potato and salt cod tart surrounded by a ragout of shrimp and topped with frizzles of fried zucchini.

Among the entrees are a truffle-crusted salmon in a coral and red wine fumet, a delicious fish that is not for the faint of heart. And among the unusual desserts you will find an orange in aspic that has absolutely no relationship to Jell-O.

The wine list was assembled by the managing partner, Scott Carney, who is a master sommelier (and former manager and wine buyer at Gotham Bar and Grill). He has assembled an excellent list of hard-to-get wines like a Marcassin chardonnay and an Andrew Will cabernet, both from the West Coast.

As for the dining room, once you get past the raucous, old-fashioned Tavern at the Tonic (which has its own, more modest menu), you find a pleasingly relaxing restaurant filled with golden light and experienced waiters. But there is more than meets the eye: the second floor has a salon and on the third floor a couple of large private rooms have their own kitchen.

The Tonic, 108 West 18th Street, Chelsea, (212) 929-9755. Main courses, \$25 to \$28.

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