



## VIVIAN'S CORNER - WHAT'S HAPPENING

### What's current and what's coming

May 2009

6/2009 Some might say that **Benjamin Steakhouse** is cloning Peter Luger. Others, myself included, want to put out a welcome mat for this relatively new mid-town Manhattan restaurant where you can feast on meat from carnivore heaven without traveling to an outer borough. Indeed, Chef Arturo McLead 's resume includes a 20-year stint at Peter Luger's, a connection, which he proudly boasts about. That experience must have been like post-graduate training in how to buy, age, and cook top-quality beef as well as veal and lamb chops.

We entered a cavernous space, which for some uncertain reason reminded me of London's Simpson's-in-the-Strand. Perhaps it could have been that both eateries are commandingly handsome. From the main dining room patrons can view the spindle-post staircase and the balcony tables to which it leads. Nothing modern or contemporary here—the design blends Art Deco and California Arts and Crafts periods. The motif incorporates a massive fireplace, wood-planked flooring, dark brown leather chairs, mullioned windows, oak paneling, curved burgundy walls, a vaulted ceiling, and brass and amber fixtures. Tables are well-spaced. Unless you read lips, you would never hear other guests' conversations. But then because of the distance, you would need to have excellent eyesight to accomplish that feat.

We asked our host, Victor, whether the bar mixed a specialty cocktail. Super-sized Benjamin martinis arrived in icy glasses. Despite the addition of cognac the drink was not sweet and delivered a kick.

Our shared appetizers won raves. Jumbo lump crabmeat was pristine and picked over so carefully that there was nary a shred of cartilage to be found. Both the crab cake and baked clams were toothsome and seasoned just-so. The biggest surprise was the delicious thickly-sliced slab of smoky Canadian bacon. Caesar salad was lightly tossed with parmesan, crispy croutons, and lemony vinaigrette.

We had, of course, come for the steak. The entire meal was nicely paced and the meat arrived at exactly the right moment. Porterhouse and filet mignon had already been sliced in the kitchen and were presented on the same plate. Using a familiar steakhouse ritual our waiter placed some filet and some porterhouse on each plate and spooned the meat juices over them. Think of all the words you would apply when beef is served as it should be—tender, succulent, rich and nicely charred—and all of them describe the steaks. We even got to take home leftovers, the bone, too. One of our party ordered lamb chops and they also tasted great.

A few days before our visit, "Good Morning America," filmed a segment that showed the chef preparing creamless creamed spinach, one of the most popular sides. Along with cottage fries flecked with snappy onion bits, these veggy and potato preparations hit the spot.

Victor suggested that we drink Chimney Rock Cabernet Sauvignon, a 2005 wine from the Napa Valley. A luscious cherry flavor burst in the mouth.

Who really had room for dessert? But aren't you supposed to finish a great dinner with a sweet? So we nibbled on strudel and cheesecake.

Benjamin Steakhouse has garnered a group loyal locals who live or work in the vicinity. On a holiday weekend the dining room was filled with visitors. If you are a townie or a tourist and meat is your passion, try Benjamin, you'll like it.

<http://www.benjaminsteakhouse.com>