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Appetite

Change is afoot ... again

The reincarnation of 3 Doors Down
by Nancy Harley

So many changes for such a little restaurant. Since its opening in the summer of 2000, 3 Doors Down has seen owners and chefs come and go as if the doors were revolving. Sue and John Daugherty with partner Ann Armour (of Manitou's missed Café Annie) started with an emphasis on healthy fresh dishes. Pastry genius Shelley Hartman put a decadent spin on the menu.



Chef Joel Wittenmyer and wife, Meg, of 3 Doors Down.

Photo By Bruce Elliott

Next came Jim and Michelle Lobato's terrific take on Southwestern cuisine, and now owner/chef Joel Wittenmyer has turned the menu toward more classic French cooking and a more elegant setting. Burgundy, blue and white linens have replaced the Provencal prints; wine selections are recommended for specific dishes; service is warm and professional. Local artwork available for purchase graces the walls. The work by two women currently hanging on the west wall merits a close look.

Unfortunately, at press time we discovered that 3 Doors Down is considering closing its doors again -- this time for good. So, quick, get over there to see what you've been missing.

The dinner menu is one Henri Larousse would be proud of: Chicken Vol au Vent, Salmon en Croute, Steak Diane. All are done well, reflecting the training Chef Joel has gotten during long years in other people's restaurants. He started in a Michigan Elks Club, worked at a Chili's, and climbed his way up to apprenticeships in more upscale restaurants in the Houston area. Via the usual surprises the universe sends our way, he and his wife, Meg were in the right place at the right time and took over 3 Doors Down last July.

They faced some challenges. Their outdoor warm weather seating is up against the noise emanating from the raucous clubs around the corner on Tejon Street: so much for moonlit romantic atmosphere. Vegetarians

have limited choices. Their menu is a tad pricey (\$20 - \$34 for entrees), and it offers dishes served at older, more established restaurants in town. Why go to 3 Doors Down for beef tenderloin?

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For starters, because it's from Ranch Foods Direct and is the best beef available in Colorado Springs; and next, because it's perfectly prepared, whether as a Steak Au Poivre, Steak Diane, or with a selection of subtle sauces. We tried the Trois Filet, good-sized filets with a green peppercorn sauce, a Choron (a Hollandaise lightly pinked by tomato puree) and a delicate butter. The zingy Pepper Steak was softened a bit by the brandy sauce. Carnivores will have a tough time deciding between the various beef dishes and the lamb chops.

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Of the other entrees we tried -- Salmon en Croute, Chicken Vol au Vent and Cannelloni, the Cannelloni was the clear favorite. It's a rich dish -- dieters be warned -- full of ground pork and cheese and a champagne white sauce, and it was scrumptious. That's not to say the others weren't good; the chicken was high-end comfort food, and the salmon was moist and flavorful.

The wine list merits a mention. Designed by Coaltrain's Jeff Frees, it offers wines from France, Portugal, Spain, Italy and California. All bottles are \$20; all are available by the glass for \$5, a terrific way to try wines you may never have heard of.

We had some fabulous starters -- the Crab Artichoke dip was chunky with crab, and the Gumbo had a dusky richness that only comes from a proper roux.

I had only one minor aesthetic quibble. The entrees that had accompaniments came with a yummy little potato souffle-ish thing and some nicely prepared celery root. Tasty but white. The plates cried out for the orange of carrots or yams, the green of beans. (I said it was a minor quibble, maybe even a mini-minor one.)

It took every bit of professional discipline to order dessert. We were sated, and crème brûlée has become as commonplace as flourless chocolate cake. We ordered two for the table. And then another. And another. It's the best in town.

Several of the evening offerings are available at lunch in smaller portions. A single filet with choice of sauce, the Salmon en Croute, and the Chicken Vol au Vent were all recently available. Hard to pass up, however, was a hearty dish of Beef Bourguignon over egg noodles. My one suggestion to Chef Joel would be to include this (and other) more "peasant" dishes on the dinner menu.

Lunch also offers several generously sized salads (a traditional Caesar, a not-so-traditional Spinach salad, and a very un-French Thai Chicken salad, not for the timid of palate). Sandwiches vary from a Croque Monsieur as good as you'll find in Colorado Springs to one as interesting as a Roasted Eggplant with red peppers, avocado and goat cheese.

Make a New Year's resolution to seek out and support locally owned restaurants, among them, this one that, reportedly, might not be here for long.

capsule

3 Doors Down

26 E. Kiowa St.

Open for lunch Tuesday Saturday, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; dinner 5:30 9 p.m.

477-9144

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