

Bites Le Bouillon | OMAHA



Pot au feu with potatoes aligot from Le Bouillon in the Old Market district.

French Fare in Steak Country

In Omaha, land of steak, there is an oasis of French cooking — the witty and charming Le Bouillon, which opened in the Old Market district in December 2013. The food at Le Bouillon is what Paul Kulik, its chef, who also runs the popular Boiler Room, describes as “everyday French fare,” an attitude also reflected in a chatty and informed staff and an unpretentious vibe.

There is a Gallic legacy to the airy brick building, which dates to 1880: It was once home to the French Cafe, Old Market’s first restaurant, which operated for more than 40 years. The structure would have been torn down in the 1960s had it not been for Sam Mercer, a financier and lawyer. Luckily for patrons, Mr. Mercer stepped in “at the nth hour and the 59th second,” Mr. Kulik said. The building, now owned by Mr. Mercer’s son, is decorated with furniture salvaged from the French Cafe and features original wooden floors, occasionally carpeted.

The menu draws from various French regions, including Aquitaine (hearty fare with a judicious use of goose and duck fat) and Basque Country (plenty of seafood), as well as ingredients from local Nebraska producers. Not everything is regional,

though: The restaurant flies in oysters from both coasts for its raw bar. During a recent visit, our fresh bivalves were paired with two tangy sauces: a classic mignonette and a creamy sauce maison made with mayonnaise and spices. Our sommelier recommended a Chablis (Le Bouillon has an extensive wine list), assuring us that its “salty notes would complement the briny oysters.” They did.

As a nod to Nebraska, I ordered the local corn soup, which was silky and buttery with a dab of chorizo oil that held it together. Mediterranean cuisine was represented by the arroz à la plancha, a fragrant bed of Calasparra rice with braised short rib and oyster mushrooms. Large plates like the braised Wagyu beef cheeks were made juicy with a red wine reduction and accompanied by a shaved celery and carrot salad.

For some reason, crunchy sunflower sprouts arrived on many of our dishes that night, though the menu descriptions called for none. We chalked it up to Mr. Kulik’s fresh, seasonal approach: If sunflower sprouts are ripe and available, why not? *CHARU SURI*

Le Bouillon, 1017 Howard Street; 402-502-6816; bouillonomaha.com. Dinner for two, about \$100.

CHECK IN

THE LARWILL STUDIO, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

A Colorful and Quirky Retreat

Rates

Rooms from 160 Australian dollars, about \$117 at 1.36 Australian to the U.S. dollar.

Basics

The ultra-hip Art Series Hotel Group in Australia consists of six properties, each inspired by a different celebrated modern Australian artist. The Larwill Studio, a tribute to the local expressionist painter David Larwill, joined the lineup with its August 2014 opening in Melbourne, Australia’s second-largest city and the nation’s cultural and culinary capital. Larwill was a major force on the city’s art scene; he died in 2011, but his signature dramatic energy lives on in the hotel’s cheery palette of bright reds, yellows and oranges, which are splashed across the airy public spaces and 96 rooms, or “Workspaces,” as they’re called.

Location

Larwill Studio is in Melbourne’s Parkville neighborhood, just northwest of the city center, on Flemington Road — close to hospitals, universities, the Royal Park Gardens and the Melbourne Zoo. Though it feels a touch suburban, there’s a tram stop virtually at the hotel’s doorstep, and you can be in the heart of the central business district in minutes.

The Room

All the rooms are similar in size; the main difference is the view, or lack of one, and the kind of bed. At first glance, my Workspace Parkview King looked like a typical spacious double room, but closer inspection revealed some quirky touches that set it apart from the average hotel offering: the colorful abstract Larwill print above the bed; coat hooks behind the door shaped like a big splatter of orange paint; funky neon wire lamp fixtures; triangular shelving on the wall; a peg board with hotel and neighborhood information, the in-room snack bar menu, and even a bookmark and pencil pinned onto it. The plush bedding is such a hit that it’s available for sale on the hotel’s online shop, and aside from a desk and large TV, there was a small divan snugly tucked into the corner. My room overlooked rolling parkland, but others may have skyline views.

The Bathroom

Nothing too memorable to report here: Mine was a standard white-tiled hotel bathroom. Toiletries are by the Australian brand Evo, and come in plain white packaging with funny text describing the products.

Dining

There was no restaurant (and therefore, no



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUCAS ALLEN

David Larwill paintings at the Larwill Studio, above. Below, a “Workspace” and rental bikes.



room service) when I visited this year, just an in-room minibar with chips, cookies, coconut water, and more. But construction was underway on the Smith & Singleton, a relaxed fine-dining restaurant that has now opened. The atriumlike lobby did house a coffee shop and some shelves with books and art supplies.

Amenities

As you may expect from a hotel in the same complex as a hospital, wellness is a serious matter for the Larwill. It has a gym with complimentary classes, you’ll find a yoga mat in your room, and guests can rent from a fleet of bright orange Lekker bicycles for \$5 an hour or \$20 a day. Other perks: You can borrow art books and art supplies like canvases and watercolors (and even iPads) from the reception desk, and there are tiny, eco-friendly Smart cars available for rent for \$50 a day (or \$8 per hour) if you don’t want to bike your way all over town.

Bottom Line

Creative, wellness-minded travelers who want to be slightly removed from the thrum of Melbourne’s city center (but not deep in suburbia) will love the Larwill for its artsy ambience, gallery-like lobby and hallways and accessible location.

SARAH KHAN

The Larwill Studio, 48 Flemington Road, Parkville; 61-3-9032-9111; artserieshotels.com.au/larwill.

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