



BRASSERIE 292

It wasn't so long ago that Poughkeepsie's downtown Main Street was a no-go zone, with gloomy, boarded-up storefronts and a menacing vibe. Then, in 2005, a young couple took a chance and opened Artist's Palate — and demonstrated how one successful business (not to mention really good food) can spark a revival. Unlikely as it once seemed, the two blocks near Market Street have become a dining destination. At the end of June, four Poughkeepsie natives brought yet more life to the district with another sleek newcomer, Brasserie 292.

Two of the partners, brothers Daniel and Chris Crocco, are hands-on, with Daniel (an Aroma Osteria alum) heading up the kitchen and Chris (ex-Bobby Flay's Bar Americain, for one)

running the front of the house. The Brasserie is set in the grand old Elting building, where a snazzy makeover has wiped out every trace of the dingy Chinese take-away that was there before. Now the 80-seat space is a modish blend of traditional brasserie hallmarks: black-and-white checked floors, white subway-tiled walls, red booths and banquettes, big mirrors, bentwood cafe chairs, tables topped with butcher paper, and a gorgeous tin ceiling gleaming in coppery paint. It's a clever blend of Parisian style and vintage Americana, and tres chic.

"We started with that ceiling and designed our way down the walls," says Chris Crocco. "We used classic design elements, going for a throwback, time-warp look, so you'd walk

through the door and be transported to Main Street, 1912. Brasseries originated in France, but you see this look all over. We didn't want it to be a faddy place, though. It's all about the food, but when you add the design it melds together."

A mixed crowd has been packing in for the traditional, robust brasserie fare: onion soup, escargot, mussels and fries, pappardelle with braised rabbit, crispy duck confit, and the like. Bouillabaisse, cassoulet, coq au vin, and not-quite-as-traditional spaghetti and meatballs make an appearance as specials of the day. "We also have hand-cut steak tartare, which you don't often see," Chris notes, adding that Daniel makes charcuterie,

too. "We're using wild game, we smoke quail, cure salmon, we're doing our own sausages. We get rabbits and pheasant from local farms," he adds. The raw bar has proved to be an attraction, and so has the regular bar, where young professionals hang out for cocktails and add to the energetic, lively atmosphere. A list of mostly French wines runs from \$26 up.

"This is my ninth opening and the only restaurant I've owned," says Chris. "I think the way the food has come off on point since opening is great. Dan really pays attention to detail.

"People wanted a place like this," he adds. "And so far, knock on wood, it's been great. A few years ago, nobody walked around here at night. That's not the case anymore. There are lots of options for everyone now."

Bottom line: appetizers \$8 to \$13; entrées \$14 to \$34.

Crowd pleasers: The raw bar, steak frites, cassoulet, and bouillabaisse

Diners' verdict: "Pretty darned stellar."

Brasserie fare: A pot full of mussels and sleeve of fries comes with tasso, leeks, and cream

