

RESTAURANTS

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Photographs by Mike Zerby/Star Tribune

Cafe Lurcat's dining area is the ultimate in chic. Everything is white, from the walls and lampshades to the tablecloths and seat covers.



The Lurcat's raw plate—a sampling of tuna and salmon tartares, raw oysters and green olive croustades—was one memorable moment.

A very white Lurcat fetes a posh crowd

By **Jeremy Iggers**
Star Tribune Staff Writer

At first glance, the differences between D'Amico and Partners' new **Cafe Lurcat** and **Bar Lurcat** and its predecessor, the Loring Cafe and Bohemian Bar, could hardly be more striking. The decor and the cuisine are both totally transformed, but the biggest difference is the clientele.

Underneath it all, however, there's a similarity. The old Loring offered a fantasy of escape; so does Lurcat —

but a different fantasy for a different demographic. The old Loring's anarchic decor suggested little cracks in the surface of reality, and escape to a more joyful anarchic life.

There are no cracks in the surfaces at Lurcat. (You can ignore the hook under the c in lurcat; it's pronounced Lur-kot.) Step inside the dining room, and the chic-ness is almost overwhelming. Everything is very white — white tablecloths, white seatcovers, white lampshades and walls. Very Armani.

The fantasy here comes straight from the glossies: The women look like Vogue, the men look like GQ, and the line of cars I saw at the valet parking station speaks for itself: a Mercedes, two high-end Beemers, a Lexus SUV, a Nissan 350Z, a Hummer and a Chevy Suburban.

So what's this clientele escaping? I'm not sure, but I've got a theory: For all of their charm and quality of life, in Woodbury, Plymouth or Maple Grove, there is nothing quite like Lurcat. At any rate, it's a crowd that likes to party; the crowd in the bar on a recent Saturday night was loud, lively, happy.

Some choice menus

The dining room menu is also totally transformed. Loring chef Patrick Atanalian concocted such fantasies as beef tenderloin with plantains, pepperoncini, sweet mango rum sauce and a Coca-Cola crème fraîche. There are no such flights of culinary fancy on Lurcat chef Isaac Becker's "contemporary American comfort food" menu. The dining room fare ranges from braised pork belly with Vermont Cheddar grits (\$7.50) and pork tenderloin with sweet and sour onions (\$15) to a whole range-hen with rosemary and thyme (\$17) and pot roast with red wine.

RESTAURANTS

REVIEW

★★★

Cafe Lurcat and Bar Lurcat

Location: 1624 Harmon Place, Minneapolis, 612-486-5500

Hours: Cafe open Sunday–Thursday 5–10 p.m., Friday–Saturday until 11 p.m.. Bar kitchen open every night until midnight. Bar open 4:40 p.m.–1 a.m. nightly.

Atmosphere: Extremely chic.

Service: Friendly, eager to please.

Sound level: Very noisy at peak hours, especially in the bar.

Recommended dishes: Tuna tartare, black cod Nobu style, braised pork belly with grits, seared ahi tuna, cheese plate.

Wine list: Mostly American and French in a wide range of prices; many wines available by the glass and in tasting portions.

Price range: Most dishes a la carte; starters \$6.50–\$12; entrees \$15–\$22.50; sides (large enough to share) \$4.50–\$10.

Credit cards: V, MC, AE, Discover.

Smoking: In the bar only.

Wheelchair accessibility: Completely accessible.

Parking: Valet parking (\$6); also on street and in nearby lot (\$3).

Children: No children's menu, but special requests accommodated.

WHAT THE STARS MEAN

- ★★★★ Exceptional
- ★★★ Highly recommended
- ★★ Recommended
- ★ Satisfactory

The dining room cuisine is mostly very good, with a few flashes of brilliance. A visitor from France proclaimed the black cod in miso (\$18.50) the best piece of fish he had



Attention to detail stands out at Cafe Lurcat—such as the pot roast with red wine that's served in a copper pot.

ever tasted, and I had to agree — it was wonderfully fresh with a delicacy of flavor that the miso glaze complemented perfectly.

There were many other memorable moments — the buttery salmon tartare with black mustard seed, capers and lemon (\$7.50); the tuna tartare spiked with fresh ginger, the plump and succulent broiled sea scallops (\$19.50) and the impossibly rich and tender rectangle of braised pork belly. (For a sampling of the tuna and salmon tartares, plus a couple of raw oysters and a couple of green olive croustades, try the combination raw plate, \$12).

Other dishes were merely very good: a classic duck terrine, laced with pistachios and duck liver (\$8), a starter of sweetbreads with finely diced root vegetables in a red wine demi-glace (\$8.50), a tender and juicy lamb tenderloin (\$19.50), the lightly seared Ahi tuna topped with lemon confit, and the side dish of brussel sprouts sautéed in butter (\$5).

From the dessert menu, don't miss the artisan cheese plate (\$7)

that includes five great cheeses, including an aged raw sheep's milk cheese from Vermont, and an Epoisse so unctuous and runny that it had to be served on a spoon. Other options include a chocolate cream cake topped with chocolate sauce (\$6), which looks and tastes like an amusing tribute to the Hostess Ding Dong, and a very pleasant rendition of pumpkin cheesecake with a Bourbon pecan glaze (\$6).

The bar menu offers some of the same small plates and salads as the dining room, plus some more typical bar fare — two small but very tasty burgers for \$6, a barbecued pork sandwich (\$6), a standard, boring shrimp cocktail (\$10), and some not-worth-the-calories mini-donuts (\$5).

The very extensive wine list offers some very inexpensive bottles, but the wines by the glass tend to be quite pricey. If you just want a taste, two-ounce pours are also offered.

Service was polished and friendly. —Jeremy Iggers is at jiggers@startribune.com.