

Time Out rating:



Harold Dieterle—the *Top Chef* winner gone bona fide New York toque—was raised on a mix of immigrant German and Italian cuisines, but he's served pretty much everything else in his restaurant career: middle-of-the-road New American food at Perilla, creative Thai at Kin Shop nearby. At the Marrow, he moves from solid, safe reality-show-style cooking to more personal territory, finally exploring his melting-pot roots.

The restaurant, Dieterle's best by far, occupies the cozy West Village corner that last housed Paris Commune, a pleasant enough space decked out in Victorian wallpaper, snug red-leather booths and antique kitchen tools sitting on wood shelves near the bar. Inside this genial neighborhood joint, though, hides an unusually ambitious chef, serving grandmotherly tastes from both sides of his family, expertly teased into upscale-restaurant shape. The menu, split down the middle—one half devoted to Mama Chiarelli, the other to Dieterle's dad—is more cohesive, and less dogmatic, than you'd expect.

The chef's rootsy cooking transcends national borders. His crisp and succulent lamb ribs—a hot-button protein these days—could be of Slavic, Turkish or new Brooklyn provenance, if not for the great German tang in their sauerbraten-style red-wine vinegar brine. A roasted marrowbone, now a ubiquitous carnivore treat, comes topped in musty sea urchin lobes and sharp mustard aioli, in a delicious but stateless surf and turf. Another blustery starter celebrates the cross-border appeal of salt cod whipped with potato. Dieterle turns the mineraly, creamy emulsion—*brandade* in France, *brandada* in Spain, *baccalà mantecato* in Italy—into delicate gumdrop *gnudi*, enriched with fluffy ricotta and slicked in melted butter flecked with plump golden raisins.

The chef's high-end comfort food sometimes seems to channel many places at once. His red-wine-braised lamb neck, falling off the bone like good osso buco, comes with excellent tart red cabbage kraut and rutabaga puree as silky smooth as a master French chef's. Braised boneless short ribs are as tender, meanwhile, as the best beef bourguignonne, piled onto creamy polenta, ground fresh in-house, and tender, garlic-soaked escarole with nutty green chickpeas adding a Sicilian—or maybe North African—touch.

Pastry chef Ginger Fisher's retro desserts, following the bicultural framework as loosely as everything else does, include warm sugared Berliners—deluxe Boston cream doughnuts with a Teutonic dose of Goldschläger inside—and excellent, Italian-accented dense chocolate pudding (*budino*) spiked with espresso and pierced with hazelnut brittle.

These sweets and much of the menu, like many great dishes, teeter on the edge of familiarity and distinctiveness, finding the sweet spot between run-of-the-mill and too strange. Dieterle's sentimentality works by never going too far—evoking the comforts of home, but only as a starting point.