

January 2008

A NEW GREAT BISTRO

Wandering chef Jonathan Pflueger returns with
Currant in the swanky Sofia

For those who have been following the local culinary scene for the last 15 years or so, the name Jonathan Pflueger will ring a bell. The ruggedly good-looking, in the Jeff Bridges sort of way (not the *Jagged Edge*, *Fabulous Baker Boys* Bridges, but more of the disheveled-haired *Fearless* sort of Bridges), much-loved chef Pflueger left the *Star of the Sea* in 1999 for a stint at New York's Russian Tea Room. The peripatetic chef then spent the next eight years taking positions around the country and opening a couple restaurants of his own before landing back in San Diego as chef-partner at Currant American Bistro.

The restaurant — its full name is Jonathan Pflueger's Currant American Bistro — is located at the new, swanky Sofia Hotel and is billed as a contemporary American bistro. The petite dining room seats a smidge over 50 and is smartly decorated in a playful take on the traditional French bistro.

The addition of all the new Downtown hotels is changing the lunch dining scene in a very positive way. Restaurants located in or at hotel properties are almost always open for lunch and Currant is no exception.

Noontime diners are offered nearly the same list of appetizers and entrées as evening diners, with the addition of a couple of sandwiches, a burger and an onion soup to die for.

The "Sweetbread Club" (\$16) practically jumps off the menu and begs to be ordered. *Pan de mie* is buttered, griddled and topped with sweetbreads that have been cooked in clarified butter until crispy and layered with smoky apple wood bacon, a schmear of creamy foie gras mousse and a caramelized red onion and sherry jam. Don't worry about your heart, "Pop a Lipitor the night before" is my mantra.

I dined one evening with a girlfriend and we

Currant
American Bistro
140 West Broadway
Downtown
(619) 702-6309



Chef Jonathan Pflueger and Currant American's delicious 'Sweetbread Club.'
(photo/alandeckerphoto.com)

started out with a couple glasses of wine and an order of truffled popcorn. I was smitten.

Next we dug into an order of the "Moules Frites" (\$13). Good-sized Carlsbad blacks were served along with some of the remaining steaming broth (wine, butter, shallots and gar-

lic) and topped with skinny, crispy, salty frites. I asked for some aioli to plop right on top and although they didn't have any in the kitchen I was told that the chef

whipped some up on the spot for me. I thoroughly enjoyed not only the mussels, but also fishing out the mayonnaisey-turned-soggy frites that sank to the bottom of the broth, as well as dipping the chewy herbed rolls I was served after ordering.

Switching gears, I moved on to the "Jumbo Blue Lump Crab Salad" (\$14). A tender lump crab salad is topped with thinly sliced Haas avocado, a salad of daikon and kaiware sprouts in a light, sweet ponzu dressing. This was a refreshing change for the taste buds after all the savory flavors.

My companion ordered the "White Sea Bass" (\$26), which was perfectly cooked and served with ginger steamed jasmine rice. The dish was beautifully presented and deli-

cious.

I am already craving the "Roasted Chicken" (\$20) on my next visit. Half a Jidori chicken is oven roasted and served with what chef Pflueger calls a Tuscan bread salad, currants and pine nuts. A combination of sautéed mustard greens and arugula rides shotgun. The dish is a great big-flavored, rustic delight.

Desserts are housemade and if you have it in you, go for the "Grand Marnier Soufflé." It's a big ending to a big meal and well worth the extra time on the treadmill in the morning.

— *Terryl Gavre*