

I N S A T I A B L E

BY CELESTE MCCALL

Wine and chocolate—what’s not to love? Just in time for Valentine’s Day Feb. 14, ACKC (Artfully Chocolate Kingsbury Confections), located near Logan Circle, has added a wine bar to its lineup of temptations. Featuring a half-dozen French wines by the glass, the bar opens daily at 5 p.m., serving until ACKC’s closing time (10 p.m. week nights, 11

p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. The cocoa bar and retail section open at 10 a.m.). While oenophiles explore the fruit of the vine, their chocolate-loving friends may indulge in hot chocolate drinks named after famous screen stars: The Marilyn Monroe (white chocolate with creme de menthe garnished with Oreos); Audrey Hepburn (dark bittersweet chocolate served in an espresso cup topped with whipped cream); Liz Taylor (semi-sweet chocolate infused with lavender and sprinkled with pistachios). Customers may also order a hot chocolate sampler for \$7.75, and a sign actually instructs chocoholics where to queue up for their “chocolate fix.”

As if that’s not enough chocolate, all kinds of beautifully displayed, decadent confections are for sale. Most ACKC ingredients come from nearby. Coffee is roasted at the Chesapeake Bay Roasting Company, a sustainable enterprise in Crofton, Maryland. Bread & Chocolate (with three cafes in the Washington metropolitan area), provides the yummy pastries.

In case you’re feeling guilty, we’ve been told that dark chocolate is among foods containing antioxidant-rich compounds known as flavonoids, which have been shown to improve heart health. And remember Katherine Hepburn’s sage advice: “Life is short; eat dessert first.”

ACKC itself is local, created by chocolate maven Rob Kingsbury and artist Eric Nelson. Both hail from just across the river in Alexandria. Washington’s ACKC opened in December at 1529 14th St. NW; call 202-387-2626 or visit www.TheCocoaGallery.com.

Café Society

On a blustery, bitterly cold Sunday, we ventured (or rather blew into) Café Saint Ex for brunch. We were immediately shown to a small round marble table near the entrance, where a winged pig statue greeted chilled patrons. Fortunately, a thick curtain protected us from the arctic blasts every time someone opened the front door.

Located near the vibrant U Street corridor, Café Saint Ex was inspired by famed French World War I author-pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupery. The restaurant’s 180-seat interior harks to that Great War, with patriotic posters and vintage photos. A model biplane dangles in a corner. The ceiling looks like faux pressed tin; the floor is polished wood. Handsome Art Deco touches recall another, later era.

But enough gazing around -- we needed to warm up fast. Soothing Bloody Marys (a good deal at \$7 each) arrived in spice-rimmed glasses, garnished with a celery stick and a giant olive. Good start. Trying to keep my New Year’s resolution, I opted for a fluffy, egg white omelette



Cafe Saint Ex's cozy interior. Photo: Courtesy Cafe Saint Ex

Bottom: Assorted Truffles. Photo: Scott Henrichsen at www.scotthenrichsen.com.



studded with diced tomatoes, avocado and Cheddar, served with a mesclun salad napped with a light vinaigrette. A healthy, tasty choice. Not so with Peter, who went for the fried green tomato BLT with a side of delicious cheese grits. (Oh well, at least he didn't get the scrapple sandwich, and I'll admit I snatched a piece of his crisp, applewood smoked bacon.) Brunch for two came to a reasonable \$35.20 including tax. Service, delivered by a pleasant young woman named Rachel, was efficient, in spite of a backup at the busy bar.

Café Saint Ex's regular menu features seasonal fare like PEI mussels steamed with garlic, chilies and cilantro; grass-fed burgers, wood-grilled tuna, zucchini cake with chocolate cream cheese frosting; house-made ice cream and sorbet. Served until 7 p.m. is a \$32 three-course, pre-theater dinner, to accommodate patrons at the nearby Source Theatre (1835 14th St. NW). Open daily, Café Saint Ex is located at 1847 14th St. NW, near 14th and T streets NW. Call 202-265-7839 or go to www.saint-ex.com

Coming soon to Logan Circle

Sweetgreen, a "sustainable" eatery which specializes in upscale salads and frozen yogurt, is expected to join the burgeoning restaurant population around 15th and P streets NW, near Logan Circle. Arriving just in time to help us keep those New Year's dietary resolutions, the health conscious newcomer is the latest spinoff of a sprightly restaurant group with locations in Georgetown, Dupont Circle and Bethesda. More good news, this on Capitol Hill: Another Sweetgreen is arriving at the former Trover's site at 221 Pennsylvania Ave. SE. ★

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