

Good Policy Comes to Logan Circle

By CELESTE MCCALL

It was Saturday night at Logan Circle just off U Street NW, and we felt like we had wandered into another city. New York maybe? Where were all the early-to-bed-early-to-rise, button-down Washington bureaucrats? We sure didn't see any along the lively sidewalk on U, or in Policy, the sleek hotspot around the corner on 14th street.

On this muggy June evening, we emerged from the Metro stop and strolled into Policy. There our party of three was greeted by charming hostess Olivia, who led us to a cozy booth toward the back of the restaurant/night spot.

Policy joined the Logan Circle dining lineup in March, 2009. Designed by Peter Hapstak III of Core, the high profile Washington architectural firm, the decor is a dramatic vision of red and black. I should add, a rather dark vision. Until our eyes adjusted to the dimness, it was hard to see. No doubt, we were dining in a nightclub, almost a retro circa-1960s supper club. Our only apparent light source came from

small inlaid fixtures in each booth, enabling us to read the menu. In addition, pencil-thin red pendant lights dangled over the bar. The ceiling looked like faux pressed tin, glittering in the semi-darkness. Along with the bright red booths, the dinette-style, Formica-topped tables harked back to the 1950s. Again, delightfully retro.

We later wandered upstairs, where the decor reflects Afghan-born proprietor Omar Miskenyar's style and interesting life. A large, graffiti-style mural depicts his attractive wife, Imren; another shows his beloved dog, who died last year. "Obama's corner" is festooned with a likeness of the president. So far, the Obamas have not dined at Policy, even though the restaurant purportedly is a favorite of White House staffers. Upstairs, crystal chandeliers add yet more pizzazz and a hint of elegance as smartly-attired patrons sip martinis and mojitos at the bar. On the small roof deck, yet more colorful, impressionistic murals depict Washington's cher-

ry blossoms. Inside, the lounge seating is casual, with comfy sofas and chairs.

The Food

Ah, the food. My frequent dining partner, Peter, enjoyed his meal so much that he ranked Policy among his top 10 restaurants in his carefully maintained and updated list. Executive Chef Brian Murphy's menu consists of tapas (or mezza) and slightly larger "small plates." Yes, many restaurants do this. However Murphy's novel creations really stand out.

As we sipped our drinks (a nice crisp Sauvignon Blanc and a tangy mojito), our competent server Ryann (that's a she) brought us concise but eclectic menus, which were divided among vegetables, seafood, and meats. Here's what we ordered, or rather over-ordered, as there was no way we could finish everything:

- Red curried lentils, accompanied by feather-light cauliflower puffs. Tasting of the exotic East, the lentils delivered just enough firepower to tingle the tongue.
- Sauteed herbed gnocchi was not the usual Italian version (made with potatoes), but a lighter flour version, tossed with oven roasted tomato, basil, caramelized onions and crowned with melted Parmesan. Delicious!
- Prince Edward Island (PEI) mussels, enlivened with spicy linguica sausage, and laced with shreds of spinach. The mollusks were plump and tender, and accompanying, crusty garlic bread was perfect for sop-



Pair of tiny lamb sliders. Photo: Andrew Lightman



Chocolate S'mores cheesecake. Photo: Andrew Lightman



Chef Brian Murphy. Photo: Andrew Lightman



Sauteed crab and asparagus. Photo: Andrew Lightman

ping up the rich sauce of Hefeweizen (a South German-style wheat beer).

- Sauteed crab and asparagus (some white, some green), were arranged with truffled asiago polenta cakes (light and fluffy), with a whisper of tarragon and preserved lemon.
- A pair of Madras curry lamb sliders, made with perfectly cooked minced lamb topped with gorgonzola cheese and a hint of mint pesto, snuggled in a dainty, doll-size toasted brioche bun. Charming, but too small.
- Zippy, roasted chicken skewers (two), escorted with a few leaves of arugula and what looked like baby spinach.

We were tempted to order more — tempora-style Maryland softshell crab, roasted lamb chops and duck spring rolls with bok choy and mango-soy sauce, but there was no way we could fit in another bite.

Chef Murphy also makes Policy's decadent desserts, such as Bev's famous coffee cake (Bev is Murphy's Mom, we learned); chocolate S'more's cheesecake (made with graham cracker crust, naturally), sour cream pound cake with blueberries and apricot sorbet, strawberry rhubarb crisp with frozen yogurt. There's also a short list of ports and other

post-prandial libations.

A protege of the late Francois Haeringer (who died recently at age 91), founder of L'Auberge chez Francois, Murphy was inspired to pursue a degree at Johnson and Wales University's College of Culinary Arts. He further honed his skills with chef John Cochran at Ruppert's (now closed), Frank Ruta of Palena, and Yannick Cam at the departed Le Relais.

Proprietor Omar Miskinyar has an equally impressive background. On an earlier visit to Policy, Miskinyar described his harrowing escape from Afghanistan after the 1979 Soviet invasion, when Omar was only five. "We fled Kabul dressed as farmers," he recalled. "We walked across the desert to Iran at night. When the Russians

threw lights on the desert, we had to drop down and hide. They were after my father because he was a journalist." However, in Iran, their troubles were not over. Since the Shah of Iran was about to be overthrown (and we know how that turned out), the family obtained fake passports and hurried to Germany. Sponsored by an uncle, the Miskinyars eventually arrived in Miami and finally, the Washington area. Now we know why the word "freedom," along with "truth" and "love," appears in Policy's front window and on the menus. By the way, Miskinyar chose the name "Policy" to reflect the distinct character of Washington.

Parking around U street is difficult, although Policy does provide valet service. Don't even think of driving on a weekend. Policy is located a few blocks from the U St./African American Civil War Memorial/Carodozo (Green/Yellow Line) Metro.

Policy
1904 14th St. NW (just off U Street)
202-387-7654

Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.; Friday Saturday 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.policydc.com. ★

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