



REVIEW

## Greenpoint Stunner Sauvage Is the Surprise of the Summer

Eater's senior critic awards three stars to the new restaurant from the Maison Premiere team

by Robert Sietsema, August 16, 2016

Photos by Paul Crisain Quilicchio

**T**aking its cue from 19th-century New Orleans oyster houses, Maison Premiere debuted at the end of winter 2011, prying open 20 varieties of raw bivalves and washing them down with Champagne and absinthe — which was all the rage five years ago, still cloaked in an aura of subversive semi-legality. The concept was simple and brilliant, and the premises were perfect in an icy and backward-looking sort of way. “This is Bedford Avenue?” The masses gasped, as lines wove out the door and down the street. Eventually, the place evolved into a more conventional seafood restaurant, featuring crudos, chowders, whole-fish entrees, and the sorts of premium-priced raw and cooked seafood one finds stacked in towers in Paris or Provence.

Sauvage (“wild” in French), the second restaurant from the team of Joshua Boissy and Krystof Zizka, with Lisa Giffen once again serving as chef, set down on the Greenpoint frontier a few months ago. Though sporting a formidable French wine list, it focused more on food than drink. Sauvage spread itself along Nassau Street like homemade butter on the cumin-scented warm roll that is one of the restaurant’s most delicious apps (\$2.50). Across the intersection lies McCarren Park, where the crack of the baseball bat punctuates a leisurely meal, at least for those who choose to perch at the outdoor tables. Over your shoulder you can see Five Leaves, the wildly popular gastropub above which the ghost of Heath Ledger still hovers.

While Maison Premiere seemed a winter retreat, Sauvage is made for long summer evenings. Inside find a barroom with a white-marble bar and a scatter of small tables on one side; on the other a dining room with black-and-white photos, wood-framed mirrors, and a collection of potted plants that it must take someone hours to water. Leather banquettes and bent-cane chairs provide seating, and illumination is furnished by chandeliers with tulip-shaped Art Nouveau shades. “This seems much more like fin-de-siècle Vienna than Paris,” a photographer friend exclaimed one evening as she ran her eye around the room, and then contemplated with pleasure the vegetable-intensive menu.

*Sauvage is made for long summer evenings.*



That bill of fare is divided into five sections by size and dish composition. In a tip of the hat to the more comprehensive raw bar at Maison Premiere, the menu begins with a mini-section that includes a single oyster service, queen crab in brown butter, and a pair of bright red Carabinero prawns tendered on ice with thick saffron aioli (\$14). Those who hate to peel and eat will skip the prawns, but they’ll be missing some very striking crustaceans. The regular appetizer list shows some of the creative verve that characterizes the chef’s best work, including a finely diced fluke crudo in a whitish fluid that turns out to be whey.

My favorite app — apart from a delightful corn-and-chanterelle soup that’s just the thing to cool your throat on a sweltering evening — is the leek terrine (\$13), rubbery planks of precisely the same dimension bound together with gelatin like sticks of gum in a pack. The terrine arrives deposited on juice-soaked whole-grain bread. To help you identify just what kind of juice, tiny manila clams are also seen rolling around the plate. The dish seems pure whimsy on the part of the chef, putting a smile on the face of every diner who orders it.

*Indeed, the chef everywhere shows her enthusiasm for garlic.*

Despite the plethora of vegetarian apps, there’s also a bonus section called Vegetables that is even larger and more meatless. Highlights include a shallow bowl of stuffed and poached vegetables called petit farce (there’s that sense of whimsy again), and a crunchy dish of sunchokes, croutons, and garlic scapes that produces one of the most powerful garlic punches of the season. Indeed, the chef everywhere shows her enthusiasm for garlic. Sadly, a couple of vegetarian offerings don’t quite work, including a carrot carpaccio featuring the thin-sliced commodity prettily plated, but a real chore to chew.



[Top: the pig head for two. Bottom: pork chop and prawns]

Especially if you’re a vegetarian or like to eat more lightly, you could do very well sticking to the small dishes. But some of the menu’s wilder and heavier conceptions are found among the main courses and shared main courses. From the former find an entire lobster (\$28) packed into half the shell, making the poached flesh seem more profuse and opulent than in a normal plating. Atypically, it comes with a heap of buttery mashed potatoes, and even more atypically, with a bowl of sweet and rich pig’s blood sauce on the side! (This is not as bad an idea as it sounds.)

For the two-fisted meat eater, there’s a pork porterhouse (\$31) drowning in herb butter like a good steak, perfectly cooked to a mild pink and set off with bok choy and pickled rhubarb. This is as good a piece of meat as you’ll find in Greenpoint — unless you’re in one of the neighborhood’s fast-disappearing Polish butcher shops. A hake entrée (\$23) garnished with an assortment of shellfish, proves less interesting compared to the pork porterhouse, but provides another bridge to the cooking of Sauvage’s tamer predecessor, Maison Premiere.

Perhaps the strangest thing on a menu filled with pleasant surprises is the pig head for two (\$65), served with creamy white beans. Wearing a smile and tanned like a Miami retiree who spends too much time on the beach, the face wiggles and wobbles on the plate. A probing fork will find vast expanses of meat, fat, skin, and connective tissue. It’s good, I guess, but this is probably the last thing you want to eat on a humid summer night in Greenpoint. ■