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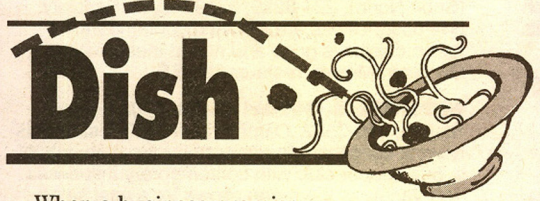


T.O.P. Dining

## So BoMA isn't a steakhouse? Too bad.

By Miriam Bowers Abbott

It's BoMA time. Again. The heavily discussed **Bar of Modern Art**, 583 E. Broad St., has had more than its share of critics—probably because big-time dreams tend to provoke big-time defensiveness.



When a business promises something unprecedented and sophisticated—something that this “cow-town” has never seen—the pledge comes across as insulting since the words imply local businesses are *not* sophisticated.

But here's the bad news for BoMA's detractors: The gallery's newly opened restaurant is every bit as delicious as promised.

Although the walk up the entrance ramp might be intimidating, warm handshakes and smiles await. Guests are directed down the hall to the restaurant, which is filled with gently illuminated glass art. Snobbery might be expected from the staff, but old-school hospitality is what's delivered.

The straightforward menu contains familiar sections: raw stuff, appetizers, salads, soups and entrées. Sure, diners won't find wings and cheese sticks, but it's easy to find other familiar favorites.

But leave it to BoMA to deliver a **Lobster Bisque** (\$6) in an unfamiliar fashion. The bisque is a shockingly dark

reddish-brown, like the roux in a gumbo. It feels lighter than a typical bisque and has sizable chunks of lobster. The result is a solid seafood soup, though devotees of heavier bisques will be disappointed.

Salad fans will find several thoughtfully prepared options. The signature **BoMA**

**Salad** (\$6) is a nice combination of greens mixed with apples, sugary dates and pecans, and full-bodied gorgonzola. The **Frisée Salad** (\$7) features the frilly greens dressed up with crunchy smoked bacon and figs. Both options provide entertaining mouthfuls of varied texture and sweet 'n' savory flavors.

For a richer appetizer, there's the **Mushroom Tart** (\$7). Paper-thin layers of pastry parchment cup around a buttery mélange of chopped mushrooms topped with sautéed spinach and a curiously magenta-colored nest of crunchy squiggles, which are strands of fried beets. Though beets can be hard to swallow, the crispy-fried squiggles are quite lovable.

The beets return in the entrée section. The **Chicken** (\$17) is an organic breast prepared with a mildly exotic Moroccan seasoning. It comes with a sweet apricot chutney and shockingly red couscous. The teeny grains are cooked in beet juice, yielding a product that's far better than beets—and far better than plain couscous, too.

There's an impressive selection of seafood on the menu. On the hearty side, there's a dense **Tuna** (\$22) with a pleasant citrus-ginger finish accompanied by mild coconut-jasmine rice. There's also a strikingly beautiful version of **Sea Bass** (\$24) cooked on sugarcane skewers—quite

sophisticated, though it inspires the urge to lick the plate clean.

BoMA isn't trying to make its name as a steakhouse, which is a damn shame. Steak lovers might have a difficult time visiting an art gallery for a filet fix, but get over it. The **Filet** (\$27) is generously cut, perfectly

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prepared and melts like butter in your mouth: *No one* does a better steak. The accompanying broccoli rabe and risotto with black trumpet mushrooms are lovely too, but everything takes second place to the perfect steak.

For more than 20 years, the city has been home to a restaurant and bar located in a former church: the Refectory. And if local diners will step up and step out, BoMA could enjoy a similarly long life.

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