

Four stars for BoMA ■ Dublin schools debacle ■ Buddy act: Oden and Conley

Columbus

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At BoMA, clockwise from bottom: tandoori pork entree, a ceviche (shrimp and lobster with avocado, mango, citrus and pickled onions) and chocolate bombe.

Although it's not a common metamorphosis, churches have been converted into entertainment spots across the country. It's hard to imagine any of those projects, though, are as ambitious as the recently opened Bar of Modern Art. BoMA is a combined art gallery, nightclub and restaurant housed just west of I-71 on East Broad Street in a massive 19th-century stone edifice that once was a Baptist church.

While I could marvel at length about the restoration, I did go to check out the restaurant, which is on the second floor (a good place to gawk at the grandeur of the place). And the dining experience matches the environment: BoMA is worthy of four stars.

The executive chef, Alex Rodriguez, hails from Puerto Rico. So it's not surprising that the spices that distinguish Caribbean

cooking—nutmeg, cumin and mace, among others—appear in appetizers, entrees and even desserts. While the menu reads as if items will be strongly flavored, Rodriguez should be commended for his restraint.

Two examples of his subtle touch were found in what is a first for Columbus: the ceviche of the day. I tried it twice; on one visit, it was bits of octopus, shrimp and lobster in a tomato and chili-based sauce. It would have been easy for the tomato and chilies to overwhelm all else, but the seafood flavors shone through. The same was true for another night's more traditional ceviche of scallops and shrimp in citrus juices, with cilantro and onion. The citrus, which can be overpowering, didn't obscure the seafood. Another example was the Kobe beef tartare. Small cubes of utterly fresh, slightly fatty raw beef were mixed with capers, pickled onion, crunchy flying fish roe and coated with

BoMA

Executive chef Alex Rodriguez creates four-star fare—often cooked to perfection with a Caribbean influence—at this former church converted into a restaurant, club and gallery.

roasted garlic mustard vinaigrette. The beef wasn't overwhelmed by the bold flavoring.

Starters were divided into two categories: raw bar and appetizers. Fresh oysters were available, as well as tuna tartare and raw salmon lightly cured with basil, lemon oil and smoked salt. Appetizers included a duck empanada, which I highly recommend, and the only two dishes on the entire menu that fell flat: lobster ravioli with a cheesy Gruyère sauce (the pasta was gummy) and a beef short rib braised in Rioja wine (the little chunk of beef was undercooked and tough).

No matter, everything else was very good. The BoMA Salad of fresh mixed greens, slivers of Granny Smith apples and candied pecans in a champagne and honey vinaigrette was crisp and tasty. Even better was the warm salad that featured a slightly bitter green called *frisée*; it came with a combination of bits of smoked

bacon, roasted peppers, figs, croutons made with brie and a Dijon vinaigrette. Don't miss the roasted butternut squash soup garnished with a spoonful of spicy, minced Creole duck confit and pungent cilantro oil. A trio of soups—squash, lobster bisque and the soup of the day—came in their own cute little square bowls (the dishes, flatware and glassware here are quality stuff). The evening I sampled the trio, the soup of the day was a bright red and delicious roasted tomato garnished with orzo.

I liked all the entrees I tried, but particularly good were the sea bass and a thick pork loin chop flavored with Indian tandoori spices. The latter was grilled and served with mango chutney, mashed sweet plantains, fennel and curried quince, along with just a touch of red mole sauce. The meat was cooked to perfection—somewhere just barely north of medium—which is not an easy thing to do with today's extra lean pork. The Moroccan-spiced chicken breast with apricot ginger chutney, beet-flavored couscous and spicy carrot reduction also was well worth ordering.

The desserts were successful, too. My favorite was the chocolate bombe, a dome of rich and intense but not bitter dark chocolate mousse with a darker chocolate coating. It was served on a triangular plate with spoonfuls of three separate sauces, each assigned to one corner: bright green mint, a yellow-orange passion fruit purée

and a vivid red tart raspberry coulis. All worked well with the chocolate. This dish makes my list of the best desserts in the city.

Other desserts were good, including fire and ice. The fire was a cone of thick chocolate mousse covered with cocoa and lightly flavored with cayenne pepper or other chilies; the ice was Jeni's ice cream, which, as always, was superb.

The wine list wasn't extensive, but was well chosen and fairly reasonably priced. Kudos to the wine steward for digging a little to find interesting producers from places such as Argentina, Spain, Chile and New Zealand—all of which are good values.

One last thing: Since the second-floor dining area overlooks the dance floor, a net has been hung discreetly to catch dropped glasses and such. A nice touch.

—John Marshall

Yu's Fusion Bistro

Despite the restaurant's name, you won't find many Asian fusion items on the menu—and a number of the dishes suffer from overly sweet sauces.

The menu of Yu's Fusion Bistro, located in Lewis Center, is as thick as a slim paperback. It takes awhile to navigate, but you'll find everything eventually. Near the back is a page for cocktails and martinis. I sampled a few and all were rather sweet, portending things to come. In fact, I've never been to a restaurant where so many of the dishes were this sweet. Perhaps the fusion that Yu's aims for is somewhere between Chinese food and Frosted Flakes.

Many of the entrees offered smaller and sweeter portions of the kind of stir-fried dishes you'd find in many neighborhood Chinese restaurants, with a scoop of your choice of steamed or (not very) fried rice. I found little evidence of "fusion" on the menu, except for the names of a few dishes playing off of the word. As in Yu-shion chicken, Yu-shion beef etc.

Looking for some semblance of fusion, I tried the duck breast with raisin sauce; the duck worked well with the sweet sauce, so no complaint in this case. Snap peas were served as a side, and turned up with a number of other dishes as well. Peking pork chop was two small succulent chops artistically posed over a sweet citrus-tomato sauce with snap peas and tiny bok choy; here, too, the sweet sauce pairing was fine.

A nicely cooked garlic sea bass, however, came with another sweet sauce that obscured not just the delicate flavor of the fish, but also the garlic. Yu's tender filet was a smallish portion of high-quality beef topped with (again) an unnecessarily sweet sauce. Overcooked Singapore noodles had a taste evocative of premade curry powder.

Yu's pad Thai was good: nice shrimp, properly cooked noodles and the right flavor for the dish. Although sweet, the Mongolian beef, with a bed of crisp rice noodles, was competent. The Japanese bacon-wrapped prawn tasted pretty much like bacon.

The three kinds of rolls were disappointing. The Shanghai (vegetarian) didn't have all that much flavor beyond oily, the tuna was somewhat reminiscent of tuna fish salad and the Vietnamese arrived without its peanut dipping sauce. Yu's dumpling sampler was two pieces each of three sorts, all a little gummy and a bit underflavored.

However, peppercorn calamari, lightly fried with jalapeños, was satisfactory. Wasabi tuna, slices of mostly raw tuna with a mild flavor, was pretty good. The nice Black & White Scallops—black and white sesame seeds coating each side—were served on kiwi with a sweetish sauce.

Yu's Fusion Bistro

50 Neverland Dr., Lewis Center
(740) 549-1800
yusfusionbistro.com

Atmosphere: Snazzy and modern.

Recommended dishes: Black & White Scallops, wasabi tuna, pad Thai.

Price range: Appetizers \$2-\$9; soups \$2-\$8; salads \$8-\$10; lunch entrees \$6-\$8; dinner entrees \$9.50-\$18.50; dessert \$6.

Hours: Tuesday through Thursday and Sunday 11 am to 10 pm, Friday and Saturday till 11 pm; closed Monday.

Service: Quite excellent: friendly, not intrusive.

Reservations: Available.

Rating: ★★

BoMA

583 E. Broad St.
233-3000
barofmodernart.com

Atmosphere: Unique.

Recommended dishes: Ceviche of the day, duck empanada, Kobe beef tartare, sea bass, tandoori pork, frisée salad, chocolate bombe.

Price range: Appetizers \$9-\$22 (for a dozen oysters); soups and salads \$5-\$12; entrees \$19-\$27; desserts \$8-\$9.

Hours: Wednesday through Sunday: cocktails and appetizers at 4 pm, dinner 5:30 to 10 pm.

Service: Experienced and well-trained.

Reservations: Yes.

Rating: ★★★★★

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★: outstanding,
★★★★: very good, ★★★: good,
★★: satisfactory, ★: mediocre,
no stars: poor