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Dom Perignon, Oysters Create Standard 'Model' Meal: Ryan Sutton

Review by Ryan Sutton



Andre Balazs has introduced a somewhat radical concept to fashionable Meatpacking District dining: low prices.

When a big swinging hotelier charges \$10 for a cocktail and \$23 for a steak, something's up. That explains the 90-minute wait for a walk-in table at the Standard Grill on a Thursday. I gave the host my number.

Dutifully, she called back just under 90 minutes later, by which time we were eating at the bar.

The good news is the Standard approaches Keith McNally's Pastis and Balthazar as one of the city's better all-day hangouts for glamorous, if not complete, gustatory bliss.

The lighting is just dim enough to make diners feel like they're wearing sunglasses indoors, which does nothing to stop diners from wearing sunglasses indoors.

Location: right under the High Line in the Standard Hotel. That means a gorgeous crowd from the galleries of Chelsea. They can splurge their dwindling commissions on a cheap glass of Dom Perignon. Most places would charge \$40. Here, they even throw in half a dozen creamy, not-too-cold oysters. I call it the "starving model combo meal." Cost: \$35.

That's a penny more than the "Walk of Shame" morning-after kit, promoted on the Standard's blog (includes a dress and flip-flops). Balazs knows how to attract guests not just with affordable prices (most everything's under \$25) but with a bit of controversy. Reports of X-rated activities in the hotel's very transparent windows have drawn national television coverage, as well as the ire of New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

Free Meat

The bar can get four deep. Try the extra-spicy riff on a Moscow Mule (vodka with ginger beer), correctly served in a copper tin.

Take your drink and hover near the salami station. The smell of charcuterie overwhelms the stench of perfume. (It reminds you of when the Meatpacking District smelled like meat.) The butchers occasionally furnish free ham. Tip them for the Jamon Iberico, cut into thick, buttery, nutty slices. Makes Prosciutto di Parma seem like amateur stuff.

Chef Dan Silverman, who did Michelin-starred fare at Lever House and miserable fare at Sunset Beach (also by Balazs) on Shelter Island, now gives us solid French-American brasserie fare. Firm pea ravioli are swathed in a pool of lemon butter.

Peking Octopus

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601099&sid=a6BexR1g_gVg

Lobster Louis is like a lobster roll without the roll -- a giant, tasty mess of sweet flesh slathered in spicy mayo. Squid is stuffed with merguez sausage; it leaves a brilliantly smoky, lingering aftertaste. Octopus must be Peking duck in disguise, with impossibly crispy suction cups and tender flesh.

Silky almond soup must be the nearest thing to drinkable olive oil and vinegar. Hollandaise sauce arrives in a carafe to save an overcooked halibut.

Eat to be seen, so sit outside and people watch. The bar, soft white, is as loud as a jackhammer. The dining room, with steakhouse reds and browns, is mostly for reservations in the prime-time hours. But who wants to call two weeks in advance for over-chilled foie gras, under-salted beef tartare and an average New York strip?

The latter had neither a heat-protecting bone nor that signature layer of fat, resulting in an overcooked cut of meat that wouldn't have been out of place at Sizzler. The cheap rib-eye for two (\$65) tastes cheap too, with little dry-aged flavor. The pork chop (\$18) is the game changer here because it eats like a steak. The outside is hot and charred with rendered, tasty fat. The interior is cool and medium rare.

Arrive late and skip the wait. The \$14 burger is on the after-hours menu. The dense, hefty patty comes with fries and a heady, almost musty collection of aged cheddar and thick bacon; the extras are a welcome rarity in the a la carte burger era, when ground meat often pretends to be steak.

Finish with the extra-sour lemon meringue tart. If you're fab enough to be here, you probably need the calories.

Rating **

The Bloomberg Questions

Cost? Most dishes under \$25.

Sound level? Bar: Thunderous. Dining room: Quieter.

Date place? Yes.

Inside tip? Pork chop and lobster are the best dishes.

Special feature? You're right below the High Line park.

Private room? Yes.

Will I be back? Late at night when the crowds thin.

The Standard Grill is at 848 Washington St. Information: +1-212-645-4100;
<http://www.thestandardgrill.com>.