



ROBERT SIETSEMA

FIRST TASTE: 10 DOWNING

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Every generation reinvents the bistro for its own purposes, which is what's going down at 10 Downing. Replacing a student-travel agency, the extensively windowed restaurant thrusts out into the urban landscape like the prow of a ship. On a recently rainy evening, those windows offered a panoramic view of cabs streaming northward on Sixth Avenue, in apparent imitation of an Alfred Stieglitz photo.

Art covers one of the dining room's interior walls, reminding us of its neighborhood, the bygone Greenwich Village of artists and activists wearing berets and chain-smoking, the raffish Village of Bob Dylan, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and John Reed. Black bent-cane chairs and blond tables fit comfortably into the large elegant room and, signaling that 10 Downing really is a bistro at heart, the waiters wear white shirts, somber black vests, and long black aprons.

The restaurant's opening was **delayed nearly a year** due to unspecified "engineering issues," but the suspense paid off. In addition to the welcoming setting, the menu, by consulting chef Katy Sparks (**Quilty's**) and chef Jason Neroni (**71 Clinton Fresh Food, Cantina**), seems to hit that sweet spot between comfort food and more ambitious dishes that reflect both chefs' eclectic tastes.

A starter of baked blobs of fresh sheep's cheese in a bright-tasting tomato confit might not be a traditional part of the bistro canon, but it was damn good anyway. Other dishes designated for sharing, including a slab of pork-belly terrine paired with miniature pickled vegetables, are perfect for snacking on at the long marble bar. Appetizers feature an ocean trout tartare shot with pine nuts and a raw quail egg and a little cast-iron cauldron of cassoulet studded with duck meatballs. Main courses, which arrive with enough accompaniments to make an entire meal, included a trio of lamb chops with cubes of feta and square chick-pea fritters, sending the plate in the direction of Greece and Nice. For sure, the modern bistro is nothing if not culinarily diverse.

Two weeks in and already attracting a boisterous crowd of devotees, 10 Downing has the makings to be a Village classic.

10 Downing 10 Downing St., New York City (212-255-0300)