

ADVENTURES IN SERY

JUNI: A joyous expression of gastronomy

August 16, 2015

Sery Kim



PHOTO: An herbivore coursing courtesy of Chef Shaun Hergatt

Hidden behind a non-descript facade in the heart of Midtown, the forgettable exterior and fading interiors of Hotel Chandler holds a radiant restaurant of commanding allure. [JUNI](#), with its humble One Michelin Star, has none of the illusory effects of decor to pivot the attention from the food, which sings with undisputable charm worthy of a second Michelin star.

Combining gastronomic inventiveness with accessibly understated elegance, [Chef Shaun Hergatt's](#) streamlined selection has a novel braggadocio. Diners are instantly compelled to answer "Is it simply enough to choose a mere category of food -- herbivore, tasting and omnivore -- and leave the details of preparation wholly to the Kitchen? Can a restaurant create more choice by essentially eliminating choice?"



PHOTO: Gorgeous summer cherries courtesy of Chef Shaun Hergatt

JUNI answers this question definitely: YES.

Whatever audacity there might be by eliminating the traditional selection of platings -- with the sometimes monstrously yet relatively bland round-robin of chicken, fish and beef -- by compelling diners to eat beyond the bounds of normative human imagination, JUNI diners are given a chance to glory in the familiar yet unknown. Furthermore, the miniscule dishes of the seven dishes in each coursing blossom beyond their size with their fullness and are impeccably inventive with smatterings of unquestionably vivid textures.

With nominal hesitation, I chose the herbivore menu and the seven courses began with a measured *hearts of palm with flavors of almond*. Upon arrival, this dish -- and really each plating -- surprised with its architectural sepulchritude. No visual was left unchallenged with deconstructed pieces flowing together through both color and taste harmony. Absolutely dazzling.

A particular favorite was the *molten organic quinoa with milkured*. Chef Hergatt gave this typically heavy dish a lightness which felt fun while the accompanying vegetables juxtaposed the smooth quinoa with the aforementioned texture consistent through each course.



PHOTO: A magical Foie Gras by Chef Shaun Hergatt

While I had no regret in my herbivore selection, my dining companion picked the omnivore vertical. His was a richer, heartier coursing with even more unusual deconstructions to traditional favorites. I had a small bite of each course and felt jealous it was not my own. "I want my own," was my inner lustful thought and have no doubt I will be returning for my own omnivore tasting.

For instance, the fourth coursing in omnivore was the best presentation of kale I have ever had. "*Tuscan kale | feather ridge farm egg*" sounds simple yet, again, Chef Hergatt added a sing-song of flavors to bring the familiar into a realm of unusual. Same for the sixth course of "*Long Island Duck | Tokyo turnips*." Lamb presented to look more like dessert than an entree compelled me to seriously consider whether Chef wasn't the Willy Wonka of food.

I dared to challenge myself with JUNI and hope the same for every NYC resident or guest. Skip some of the more bright-light and bold-faced names in the New York City foodie firmament by reserving four hours of your time at JUNI. This is a decision you will never forget.