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## **Danny Brown: New food paradigm enters Forest Hills**

By Suzanne Parker

**Danny Brown, a Forest Hills native who's come home to roost, has brought sophistication to his old neighborhood with his new self-named wine bar and kitchen.**

If some restaurant locations seem to be jinxed with repeated closings, let's hope the reverse is true of the former wildly successful Dee's location that Brown chose for his venture.

It is less casual than the former Dee's, with white cloths on the tables and '60s abstract expressionist paintings on the cream colored walls, adding more than a touch of class, but not at all stuffy. The vibe is a youthful one.

Brown has set forth some lofty aspirations for his new establishment called Danny Brown Wine Bar & Kitchen. He wants it to embody the pleasures of a French wine bar, an Italian "Enoteca," and a Spanish Tapas bar, as well as that of a conventional restaurant.

If anyone has the knowledge and experience to achieve these ambitious goals, he's the one. His parents have a wine importing business and his French mother is an accomplished cook. He has worked in both the kitchens and fronts of many notable Manhattan restaurants as cook, catering chef, waiter and sommelier and has done stints in some of the tonier kitchens in Paris and Spain.

It is not by accident that "Wine Bar" precedes "Kitchen" in Danny Brown's subtitle. The menu is conceived to be enjoyed with wine. There is an extensive choice of wines by the glass that pair perfectly with every dish. The staff can suggest appropriate pairings if you need help. The wine list tilts toward the affordable, with special emphasis on biodynamic wines - those that favor the traditional winemaking methods, eschewing pesticides and chemical additives to the extent commercially viable. Not quite organic, but trying.

On one side of the menu there is a selection of cured meats and cheeses, which can be ordered individually or as various combined platters. Typical of the aforementioned European styles of sipping and snacking, this approach could serve as a hefty cocktail hour, a light supper, or an after-the-movie treat. The selection of meats and cheeses are all first rate, and European imports with only one California goat cheese exception. We were surprised, however, by the omission of Serano ham, the quintessential tapas.

The next set of options is a list of "snacks." Hot polenta sandwiches stuffed with oven tomatoes and wild mushrooms is the most inspired of this category.

Somewhere between the snacks and something more substantial lies the "Small Plates" category. These also make good appetizers. Several can be ordered for more sustenance, or to be shared at the table. Roasted chorizo sausage with red wine and green olives is a real tapas classic. Serano ham croquettes take the humble croquette to a new and luxuriant level with saffron aioli. They're almost a kiddie food for grown-ups. Warm risotto pancake stuffed with pecans and Gorgonzola with tomato vinaigrette was lusty, sure to delight any vegetarian in your party. The mixed field green salad was fresh and well prepared.

More serious chowing down can be found in the "Bigger Plates" section of the menu. Wild mushroom risotto with truffle essence is divinely aromatic and satisfying. The papardelle pasta with oven tomatoes, thyme and arugula is made by hand daily. Grilled hanger steak with horseradish whipped Yukon gold potatoes was tender and flavorful, a truly excellent piece of meat, and the accompanying potatoes sinful, although we found the sauce a bit too vinegary for our taste. Organic chicken "under a brick" a Tuscan dish, is literally made with a brick. It is a perfectly roasted, flattened organic chicken half served with rosemary skillet potatoes and wilted escarole. This dish was our personal favorite.

The desserts don't disappoint either. The flourless chocolate cake with caramel ice cream is a chocoholic's dream. Other options include warm apple tart with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce, marscapone cheese cake and almond cake with Amaretto cream anglaise.

#### The Bottom Line

Danny Brown is a welcome new addition to Forest Hills. Its strengths are the depth of its wine list and the flexibility of its menu. It updates the tired old descriptor "Continental cuisine." Maybe it's "nouvelle" or "nuovo" or "nuevo" Continental. Whatever. Of course, the talent in the kitchen is what makes it all work.

#### Danny Brown Wine Bar & Kitchen

104-02 Metropolitan Ave., Forest Hills

718-261-2144

Cuisine: Nouvelle, Nuovo, and Nuevo Continental

Setting: Small space attractively appointed

Service: Excellent waitress, waiter with tunnel vision

Hours: Sundays, Tuesdays to Thursdays, 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Mondays closed.

Reservations: Recommended on weekends

Alcohol: Full bar

Parking: Street

Dress: Casual

Children: No menu

Music: No

Takeout: No

Credit Cards: Yes

Noise Level: Noisy when busy

Handicap Accessible: Yes

A Sample from the Menu

Cheese board...Small (serves 1-2) \$25 / Large (serves 3-4) \$32

Tasting of Cured Meats...\$22

Hot Polenta Sandwich...\$5

Serano Ham croquettes...\$7

Warm risotto pancake...\$7

Parpadelle with oven tomatoes, thyme leaves, & arugula...\$15

Grilled hanger steak...\$19

Organic chicken "under a brick"...\$18

Flourless chocolate cake w/caramel ice cream...\$6