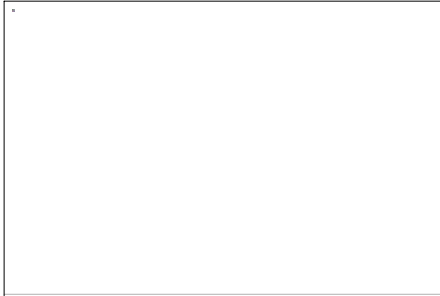




03/21/2006

## Take 'The Voyage' to laidback manor

By PAM GIBBENS , Greater Houston Weekly



### Roquefort blue cheese "rilette"

competition with his progressive American style.

Conveniently located at 706 Main Street in downtown Houston, laidback manor is well...laidback. No fancy white tablecloths, no fuss, no frills. It's about the food, said Rucker more than once.

"It's not about me," said Rucker who also plays guitar and keyboard. "It's about what Houstonians need to be exposed to. Don't get me wrong, I love chicken fried steak. One night a week I might go out and get some. But that food has all been done before and it's not what we work on 18 hours a day. We want to push ourselves. It's about a movement of young chefs asking 'why' and 'what if'."

Fascination with food and fun inspired the young chef to break out of the pack to forge a new path.

"At laidback manor I want to offer my guests a complete new way of enjoying their meal," said Rucker, a 2000 graduate of Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. "Being a chef gives me an opportunity to make people happy; I really enjoy making people smile. I want my guests to explore their palate and discover new flavors, temperatures and textures."

With a mood that's mellow, laidback manor's superior staff strives to surprise.

Beginning with the cool cucumber and crown dill soup with mushroom and green apple cannelloni, this dish will melt in your mouth, causing you to yearn for more. For the lite-lunch crowd, try the amuse bouche, puree of creamy California avocado with mancho cheese "air" or the gulf blue crab risotto with lime zest. Many of Rucker's recipes are served with fluffy clouds of froth, air and foam. "We take pride in using not so common food pairings," Rucker said.

Forget Atkins! Experience the freshly-baked Navaho bread served with sweet homemade butter.

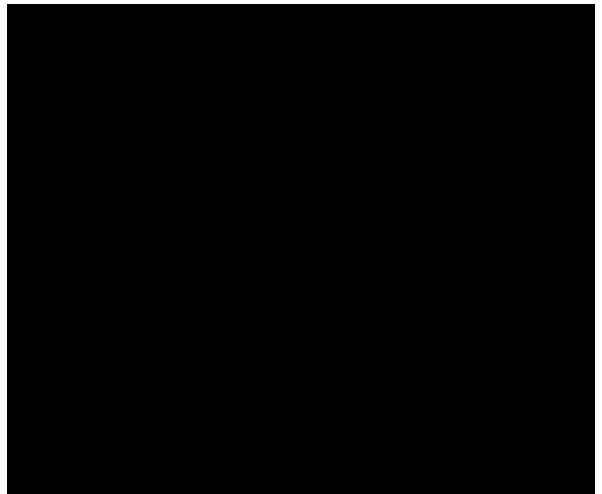
Audiences agree, laidback manor is all about adventure. In the evening, daring diners are encouraged to take "the voyage," a progressive dinner that features smaller portions of almost everything on the menu, from cape bay scallops with charred oranges to "snake river farms" flatiron kobe beef with reduction of cardamom.

Rucker prepares many of his dishes in the sous-vide method, a process which vacuum-seals food with aromatics and interesting flavors. His famous, fork-tender Berkshire pork rib is braised in Dr Pepper and then cooked at a low temperature in a water bath controlled by an immersion circulator for 60 hours! Before the dish is served, the ribs are carefully removed.

"Cooking sous-vide allows all the flavors to come together in a way that conventional cooking methods do not," Rucker explained. "The pork doesn't lose any of its flavor, and the flavor is enhanced throughout the process."

Rucker's team includes chefs Shaun Duffy and Seth Gardner.

Advertisement



Their motto might be something like...waste not, want not.

"We save money by buying a whole cut of meat. We use the bone to make consomme and we make our own proscuitto and bacon. If we get beautiful pheasants, we explore every option, using all of the raw product. There is very little waste. Nothing goes in the trash can."

Rucker's newly-refurbished, stainless steel kitchen, affectionately called "The Laboratory," is a training ground for up-and-coming new chefs and his more than capable staff. The latest equipment, like his "Paco" jet machine, are among his high-tech tools of the trade that can whip up a pineapple sorbet in a flash.

"Everyone's welcome in the kitchen," Rucker said enthusiastically. "They can come here and ask me questions and meet all of the chefs. We have a private dining area where guests can try different food. This is where we really get down."

To "get down" with Rucker and associates call 713-227-0402. The restaurant is open for lunch Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. and for dinner Tuesday through Saturday from 5:30 to 11 p.m.



[www.havenwoodtexas.com](http://www.havenwoodtexas.com)

Feedback - Ads by Google

©Houston Community Newspapers Online 2007