

Bill Boggs Corner Table: New York's Café Carlyle, America's Greatest Nightclub

The legendary nightclub offers great food and world class performers



Boggs with maitre d' Carlos Rivera.

Bill Boggs

There was a long-ago time, well before the "Kardashian Era" we are now experiencing, when nightclubs had a unique popularity and important place in American entertainment culture, but surely not as a culinary experience. New York had The Copacabana, The Persian Room, The Empire Room, The Living Room, and many more. The **Cafe Carlyle** survives as a place for top-notch entertainment as it brings the golden age of New York nightlife alive but with outstanding food in an intimate room ringed with original murals painted by French artist Marcel Vertes.

Years back, a friend of mine had a Caesar salad mangled with tomatoes and grapes at the Copa. Near raw prime rib, or just-defrosted shrimp in a bleary shrimp cocktail would not have been unusual plated in front of you at almost any nightclub in America. It wasn't about the food, it was about seeing Frank, Ella, Bobby, Peggy, or almost any of the iconic singers and comedians from the 50s through mid-seventies.

These days, the Cafe Carlyle offers exquisite dining along with its roster of talent. If you go for the show and miss dinner, you've made a mistake. The shining star on the menu is "Bobby Short's Chicken Hash." The recipe is a legacy of the brilliant singer/pianist who played the room continuously for three decades. His picture hangs in the hotel lobby. He is missed but — wow! — does his creation live on. The chicken hash is an almost sinfully rich blend of white and dark meat chicken, truffles, foie gras, and potatoes cooked in a light sherry cream sauce. This entree is one of the best I've had in any restaurant in the world this year.

Drop any preconceptions of nightclub food and savor these dishes, which are a few of my favorites on the menu;

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Appetizers: Hamachi tartare with avocado, pink peppercorn, soy-truffle vinaigrette; a truly jumbo shrimp cocktail; steak tartare with spicy aioli, and olive-oil baked sourdough crostini; and Carlyle lobster bisque.

Main Courses: Try the grilled corn and tomato risotto, a terrifically savory dish and perfect with a glass of their Sancerre. The wild king salmon out-does most wild salmon dishes even at seafood restaurants because of the accompanying Romano beans, fingerling potatoes and bacon salad and pickled peaches that compose the dish. While I rarely order chicken when I'm dining out (because I eat so much at home), I was very impressed with the truffle roasted chicken from Murrays Farm in New York, with crushed fingerling potato and shallots and garlic, corn and mushroom ragout. Chef Johnny Cardena has a master's touch.

Desserts: I keep ordering the apple tarte tatin, but always manage to have several forkfuls of my girlfriend Jane's order, New York cheesecake with graham cracker crumb crust and fruit compote. There's also a fine artisanal cheese selection and house made condiments along with it.



Cafe Carlyle's performance area

The on-stage menu currently features John Pizzarelli and his wife Jessica Molaskey from November 3 until the 28th, Steve Tyrell from December 1st through January 2nd, and the legendary Chita Rivera from January 12th through the 23rd. Woody Allen and the Eddy Davis New Orleans Jazz Band perform every Monday (no gumbo included). Earlier this season I had a great evening at the club watching Buster Poindexter.

The place is truly wonderful; traditional, yet forward-looking both on stage and on the menu. Look for maitre d' Carlos Rivera at the door, and tell him I sent you!



Bill with Buster Poindexter