

Volt Restaurant is always a winner

By Father Leo Patalinghug

Food fans of Bravo's TV reality cooking show competition "Top Chef Season 6" are familiar with Chef Bryan Voltaggio's near victory. He lost to his younger brother, Chef Michael Voltaggio, in a dramatic finish.

The Voltaggio brothers from the Frederick area are cutting-edge chefs with high culinary pedigrees, known as clever and classy food technicians who use food science for fantastic, clean flavors. The success of Chef Bryan's signature restaurant, Volt, which opened its doors in 2008 in Frederick, is attributed to hard work and dedication to a creative restaurant concept.

Chef Bryan, business collaborator Hilda Staples and a crew of highly trained palates and energetic food talent transformed a 19th-century brownstone mansion into a big-city, classy, modern restaurant with clean lines and non-intrusive accessories. The lack of visible handicap access and parking may be difficult for some patrons. Volt offers several dining venues including a private dining room, outdoor dining, a bar area, main dining room, and in the kitchen, where, for \$121, reserved guests can sit at a bar to watch the action and be served 21 courses.

The modern American haute cuisine may intimidate some, but the unpretentious staff offers genuine hospitality and food education with a smile. Servers - wearing brown suits and brown fish head sneakers - strike the balance between whimsical and formal. Everyone enthusiastically offered guidance through the menu - a combination of familiar and unfamiliar foods, but with a unique (almost scientific) precision and twist. The wine menu, featuring many from Meritage in California, offered great variety with a sommelier to help diners pick the perfect glass or bottle. Volt does require that each table decide between a "tasting" menu (vegetarian option included) or make sure that each diner gets the same number of courses from the a la carte menu. This menu organization allows servers to present each course flawlessly and simultaneously. For me, this created a dining anticipation that I've not had in a long time.

The food is worthy of Top Chef, of course. That evening, the chef de cuisine, Graeme Ritchie - also a finalist for "Top Chef Masters Season 5, Battle of Sous-Chefs," prepared the meal. It started with an amuse bouche (one-bite opener) of beet and foie gras macaroon, which dissipates on your tongue, leaving the foie essence and bright beet juice. Fantastic! Equally wowing plates followed. The farm-to-table yellow tomato-and-crab soup was tart, sweet, and had a hint of savory mustard. Creative pasta courses, such as squid Bolognese, elevated an Italian classic. Chef Graeme then offered a complementary fish course, perfectly cooked with unique

sauces. The meat course proved deft cooking techniques, as each season-balanced, fork-tender bite brought smiles and wonder. Desserts were deliciously familiar in taste, but presented as works of art with variety and texture. Each patron then even received a parting gift - a coffee cake - just to remember the award-winning meal. My dinner at Volt only happened because of the invitation of good and generous friends. In a season of remembering and to "give thanks," this dinner made me ever grateful for the power of good food and excellent service. Celebrity chef Bryan Voltaggio and his crew at Volt will always win over hearts and minds - the important victory in life.

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