

Feast And Film

Cass House And *The Spirit*

By Teri Bayus



Every New Year, I make a list of things I want to accomplish and then another that I *should* accomplish. They are very different lists, and it is always interesting to determine which list got the most effort. This year is going to bring some huge changes for this writer, and I welcome them almost as much as I fear them. That is what life is about: new adventures.

I spent New Year's Eve at my favorite place, Cass House in Cayucos, and it was perfection. Grace and Jensen (the owners of the restaurant) were married this year in Europe and brought home with them some amazing pairings. When I found out that Jensen, who is also the chef, was a local boy and not a famous chef stowing away in Cayucos, I was even more impressed. With Grace's perfect pairings of wine and Jensen's daring genius in the kitchen, I wish I could eat here every night.

The amuse-bouche (a fancy term for

truffle tremor on gingerbread with honey was an explosion of flavors. The Rogue River blue served with marcona almonds and guava would delight my French friend. The seared Sonoma foie gras is the best anywhere. If you haven't tried this delicacy, the Cass House—where it's served on brioche with quince paste, peanut and a bourbon barrel-aged maple syrup—is the only place to try it. Words fail me just how perfect this was. I will dream about it for weeks. It was paired with Chateau de Yquem, a sauternes from France. Perfect, wonderful; I'm still in awe.

The next palette cleanser was a hibiscus soda served in a small shot glass. The essence of hibiscus is boiled down to a tea, then simple syrup added and the mixture is stirred with Pellegrino sparkling water. On to the main courses. The butter-poached Maine lobster was flawlessly prepared with the soul of the fish shining through the butternut-squash purée, a chanterelle-beet

right through the New Year and toasted the flawless waitstaff that helped to make this dining event the highlight of the year. Bless you all, and I will be back.

The Spirit is by one of my favorite directors, Frank Miller (I watch his *Sin City* repeatedly). Based on a graphic novel (basically comics for grown-ups), *The Spirit* has all those comic-book elements. Suspend belief and enter the world of six panels on a page.

The Spirit manages to be wondrous and infuriating. Frank Miller was the perfect choice to bring the film to life; he created a visual feast. On

Johansson is hilariously withering with her acerbic barbs to The Octopus' clone lackeys, all of whom are played with deadpan wit and verve by Louis Lombardi. It is hard, in fact, not to feel some pity for Gabriel Macht (the title character), who has to play Bud Abbott to a cast of rollicking, scene-chew-



palette cleanser) was a hard-boiled quail egg done "deviled" with white truffle—utterly amazing. The second amuse-bouche was a Washington raw oyster with black caviar and citron gelatin. I was in heaven. We ordered the wine pairings, and the Manzanilla sherry from Spain was a spectacular accompaniment to the oxtail consommé with braised oxtail, sesame oil, satsumas and caramelized onions. My Flying Goat bubbles paired perfectly with my arugula-sylvestra-beet salad with butternut-squash fritters, chèvre cheese and sherry vinaigrette.

I loved that they let me have my beloved cheese as my second course. (This practice makes my French friend's hair stand up on her neck in horror). All choices were American artisan cheeses, and my favorite was from Santa Margarita—a Pozo *romme* served with sliced pear and flatbread. The

demi-glace and fennel pollen. The marrow fritters were: a first for me and a new favorite. After three years of eating out once a week, this was the best meal I have ever had.

The Kobe beef with sweet breads and a tamarind-glazed Zabuton short rib with *poeme purée*, truffle butter and shallot rings sang through my taste buds with the L'Adventure Optimus as my liquid. The best part was that everything used in the meal was in season, a difficult task in the winter. This chef should be cloned and dipped in gold, but I don't want to lose him to some fancy restaurant in L.A.

Next came a flourless chocolate cake with passion-fruit-caramel mousse and passion-fruit sorbet, a dessert that could bring world peace. The other dessert was a lemon-meringue tart with an amaretto crust and candied kumquats. We dined

the other hand, the dialogue is often cheesy and the characters so over the top that the movie never allows you to be lulled into that wonderful moment of forgetting that you are watching a movie.

There isn't a single character in the movie who talks like a real person. They all talk like, well, comic-book archetypes: gruff commissioner, megalomaniacal supervillain, brilliant evil assistant, sultry femmes fatales, loyal and uninteresting love interest, and on and on. Take Samuel L. Jackson's character, The Octopus, for example. It is a character Jackson was born to play, and he throws every ounce of his endlessly entertaining and over-the-top style into the character. It works, and he plays the part brilliantly. Because he takes this ridiculous dialogue and has wild amounts of fun with it, it works. The cast, by and large, follows his lead. Scarlet

ing Lou Costellos in an overacting competition. The names on the shirts are hysterical. It all works wonderfully if you're willing to view the film as a gentle lampoon of comic-book films.

So is it worth the ride? I think so—if you go in with the proper expectations. There's not really anything new visually if you've seen *Sin City* or *300*, both Miller works—all three films have plenty of humor where it may or may not have been planned while carrying the potential to be a cult classic. This is the kind of movie you can best enjoy in the company of friends.

Teri Bayus, who is hoping that the Cass House is on your reservation list for Restaurant Month in January, can be reached at mailplus-pismo@aol.com.