

H₂O Bistro & Bar, Portland, OR (Garber review)



review by Anne Garber

H₂O Bistro & Bar
50 Morrison Street
Portland, OR

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Okay, let us be honest: My husband John Keyes and I have dined in some of the world's absolutely BEST restaurants, including Paris' famed **Tour d'Argent**, and the **Georges V**. To be candid, we have acquired a certain level of gastronomic snobbery along the way, and we are not easily impressed. We try our best not to be too tough on the little Ma-and-Pa eateries, but when it comes to restaurants that present themselves as "fine dining," well our red pencils are poised and as sharp as our knives to "mark down" restaurants for the slightest "infraction" of our code of excellence.

So when we dined at Portland's brand new **H₂O** Restaurant recently, we were indeed pleasantly



surprised to discover its standards -- and excellence in everything from the flatware and décor to the innovative and delicious food -- was absolutely top-notch. As I said, we don't normally rave about new restaurants, but in this case, it is certainly deserved!

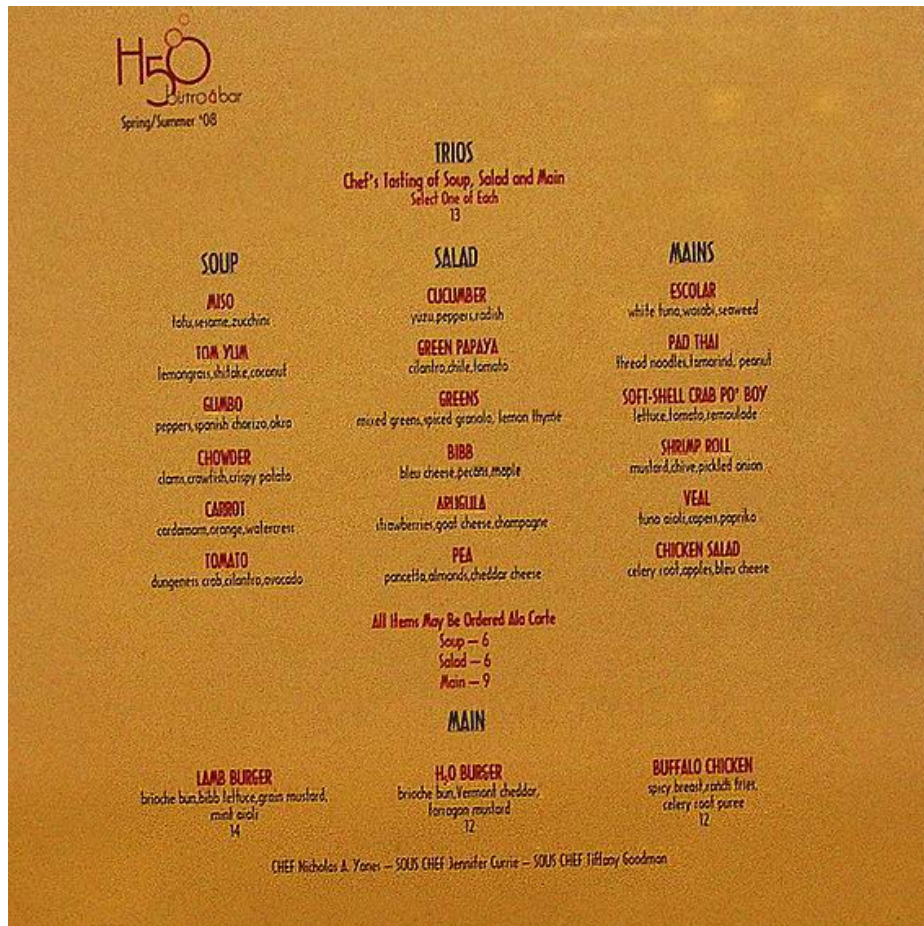
Over the course of two days, we managed to sample breakfast, lunch and dinner, with nary a flaw or wrinkle in sight! Here's a cross-section of the dishes we tried.

Breakfasts are à la carte. I put together a meal of bacon and eggs, which arrived perfectly matched to my order. I should also mention that the coffee was exemplary.

At lunch, we discovered that Executive chef Nicholas A. Yanes has designed a kind of "horizontal pairings" format to his menu. You can mix-and-match, of course, but if you want to leave the decision-making to the kitchen's (perhaps higher) wisdom, you simply choose *horizontally* (see photo below to get the concept).



Executive chef Nicholas A. Yanes is only 26, but has already built a top-line reputation in Dallas, and maintains the same high standards in Portland.



Chef Yanes -- who is of Venezuelan and Greek extraction -- is a rising star on the local dining scene, and his menus reflect both local ingredients and global influences. He most recently worked in the culinary hotbed of Dallas, Texas.

The lunch menu offers a selection of "trios," meaning diners are encouraged to select a soup, a salad and a main course, all for a mere \$13. A soup might be tomato with Dungeness crab, cilantro and avocado; a salad could be pea with pancetta, almonds and cheddar cheese, and you could finish with an entrée like the soft-shelled crab Po' boy.

For starters at dinner, we had the Hawaiian-influenced *manapua* (steamed buns, Kahlua pork, green onions) and the lobster tom yum soup (an amazing taste sensation combining the crustacean with shiitake mushrooms, cilantro and coconut), followed by a succulent chicken breast (with *salmorejo* sauce, chile rellenos and tomatillo) and the duck with scallops (with baby fennel, orange and absinthe). From the restaurant's five-item dessert menu we selected the *manjari* chocolate mousse (graham cracker, macerated bing cherry, Chantilly cream) and the churros (kumquat coulis, chocolate), both quite simply to die for. It all adds up to fine dining at an eminently affordable price.

