

The Real McCoy

Savoring New American Cuisine in Fells Point

Birds of a Feather

1712 Aliceanna St., 675-8466

Several years back, on America's college campuses, ex-con G. Gordon Liddy debated pharmaceutical omnivore Timothy Leary. Weird. Audience members, had they been polled, might have said that when it came to ingestion, Leary advocated piggishness while Liddy leaned more toward priggishness. I guess this is why the signed, framed, eight-by-10 glossy of Liddy, presiding over the bar at this chummy Fells Point eatery, seems an odd choice as mascot.

The bar has been around for 12 years (that's three times longer than the sentence Liddy served for his Watergate crimes), quietly attending to its regulars and amassing an encyclopedic collection of single-malt Scotches. The 32-seat restaurant, however, opened for dinner only this past May. There are two cozy dining rooms, one just off the bar with a working fireplace and a smaller, non-



CHEAP

Eats

BY LAURA REILEY

smoking room upstairs that seems perfect for private parties.

This neighborhood already teems with burger joints, where you mark the time between each cold one by

consuming ground chuck in many guises. Chef Tim Pritchett, who has cooked at the Harbor Court Hotel downtown and most recently has cooked at a restaurant in Sacramento, is interested in doing a bit more. He cooks what he calls New American cuisine—a smattering of Asian spices, Mediterranean ingredients, French sauces, and classical techniques. And he's serving it up on two menus: a gargantuan leather-bound one that offers dishes such as chicken taragon bleu and Oriental-style pork tenderloin, and a light-fare menu of soups, salads, and sandwiches. Both are winners, but it's the light-fare menu that offers the true bargains.

Soups are hearty and filling (all hover around \$3.25 for a bowl). The model French onion was made even more savory with the addition of a

heap of fresh thyme. Pritchett evidently doesn't fear the wrath of the American Heart Association, as his cream soups are delicious and deadly. The smoked oyster soup is an excuse to lap up an absurd quantity of sumptuous cream ladled around these august bivalves.

Salads are uniformly well made and reasonably priced. The house salad is a steal at \$1.95—green- and red-leaf lettuce lightly dressed with a solid herb vinaigrette, and given a little zest by rings of white onion. My favorite, though, is the watercress salad with goat cheese and sun-dried cranberries (\$3.95), dressed with a walnut vinaigrette. My appreciation of its gracefully melding flavors was surpassed only by my enjoyment of the big-as-your-head size. The Caesar salad (\$4.95) won't give you a garlic or anchovy buzz, but add grilled chicken (\$2 more), and it's an ample meal.

After having impugned pub grub, I must say that Pritchett's version is satisfyingly rib-sticking. The house burger (\$5.95 to \$6.95), the pâté du jour (usually around \$4.95), and the changing selection of grilled game sausage (\$6.95) are all fine accompaniments to a pint of DeGroen's Märzen on tap. For something a bit more refined, the fresh angel-hair pasta with smoked salmon, sun-dried tomatoes, basil, and Marsala cream (\$6.95) is a successful effort. My

companion kind of liked the fried fresh ravioli filled with a simple mushroom duxelle (\$4.25), but since I'm the one writing this review, I get to say it was a clunker.

On the dessert front, bag the cheesecake in favor of a malted barley beverage. If you don't know much about single-malt Scotches, owner John Horn (he's the Liddy fan) will pick one that's to your liking (\$3.75 on up). You may want to try a Scotch from Islay such as the Laphroaig, with its iodine and peaty flavor, or one of the smoky, full-bodied Scotches of Speyside, including the Macallan that is offered with 12, 18, or 25 years of barrel aging. Horn also stocks a selection of vatted malts, or blends of single-malt Scotches from a variety of distilleries.

A famous Prohibition-era smuggler, a certain Captain McCoy, guaranteed that any Scotch he sold was the real thing. Whether you live like Liddy or Leary, Birds of a Feather will serve you satisfying food and drink. It too is the real McCoy. ■

Food served Monday through Saturday, 5 to 10:30 p.m.; bar hours are Monday through Friday, 4 p.m. to 1 a.m., and 2 p.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday.