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Masq Brings New Orleans Flair to Midtown



A porcelain mask hangs on the wall.



Jambalaya, with a dab of goat cheese.



Shrimp po' boy on a sweet Hawaiian roll.

By Channaly Philipp
Epoch Times Staff

Walking into Masq is like entering an eccentric and well-traveled relative's home. Persian rugs, carnival masks, antiques, and varied seating arrangements in different nooks and crannies make for a whimsical atmosphere.

Close by, on neighboring Second Avenue, Irish bars cater to the younger set, said co-owner Nora Chaprastian, who runs Masq on 49th Street with her husband George. Masq is different. "Our kind of decor, comfy, loungey, antique furniture. ... It's more a place you'd find downtown."

Even the white oak bar at the entrance is unconventional: it is horse-shoe shaped, with a constellation of exposed lightbulbs above set in a carousel-like formation.

"It's so fabulous, no matter where you sit at the bar you can talk to whoever," Chaprastian said.

The porcelain masks on the wall are a nod to the New Orleans-theme, Masq being short for masquerade.

As it happens, Nora Chaprastian's mother was a travel agent, who would take her along on "fam" trips, or familiarization trips, when she was young. One of those trips happened to be New Orleans, for which she experienced an instant fondness.

The cuisine is primarily New American, with some dishes from New Orleans. Those are the dishes that I find most interesting, in no small part because of the Cajun spices.

New Orleans Flair

The mac 'n' cheese croquettes (\$8) are not small delicate things, but closer to golf ball-size; at three to a platter, it makes for a rather gargantuan appetizer that's best for sharing.

There's a delightful contrast between the lightly crispy exterior, coated all over with panko crumbs, and the yielding soft comfort of macaroni and cheese inside. They come with a spicy remoulade of Cajun spices and mayonnaise on the side—perfect if you like spicy but easy to leave alone if you don't.



Masq hosts live music acts on Thursday evenings.

The jambalaya (\$17) is unusual but lovely: the andouille sausage provides a nice kick to the mix of chicken, shrimp, and rice, but a dab of goat cheese, as unconventional as that might be, softens the heat and gives the jambalaya a nice hint of creaminess.

Other items that recall a bit of New Orleans include the Po Boys, served on a baguette or a sweet Hawaiian roll, either with catfish, chicken parmesan, shrimp, or spicy meatballs. (\$15–\$16)

Other items are more reminiscent of standard American fare—quesadillas, flatbreads, burgers, and crab cakes.

A two-course prix fixe lunch is \$10.95 including a glass of wine or beer. Lunch entrees range \$10–\$14; dinner entrees range \$12–\$26.

Masq
306 E. 49 St.
(between First and Second avenues)
212-644-8294
www.masqny.com

Hours
Monday–Saturday
11:30 a.m.–midnight
Happy Hour: Monday–Friday
4 p.m.–8 p.m., all day Saturday



Mac 'n' cheese croquettes.



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—New York Magazine



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