

JAMESCHATTO.COM
BACK TO HOME

E11even

01 Mar



E11even

High excitement on Saturday as my wife and I toddled down to the ACC to take in the Leafs-Penguins game. It was a hugely entertaining contest that the Leafs should have won. Still, every point helps. The immortal Paul Henderson dropped the puck which was a thrill for Wendy as she remembers The Game and The Goal very vividly. She was 15 at the time and her enlightened school gave everyone the day off so they could stay home and see the Canada-USSR finale. She and her pals lay on her parents' bed to watch television and when Henderson scored, they jumped up and down so hard they broke the bed. Me, I bleed blue and white (though to be perfectly honest it's the blue and white of Chelsea Football Club masquerading as Leafs ichor – but no one needs to know that).

After the first period, we had a tour of the jewelled underside of the stadium, including the newly revamped Platinum Club, glimpses of the hive of private boxes and the Owners' Lounge – a labyrinth of glamour to rival Vespasian's Colosseum. All sorts of delicious treats were on offer but we were in no way hungry, having dined before the game at E11even.

This is not Real Sports Bar, that vast, night-club-lit, two-storey nonpareil of all sports bars, elsewhere in the ACC, with its enormous tv screen and ebullient energy. E11even is more of a clubhouse for elite fans, with pampering service and a very extensive winelist cutely offered to customers on iPads. (Jennifer Huether, Head Sommelier of the Maple Leaf Sports + Entertainment organisation, just gained her Master Sommelier designation to become one of only three Master Sommeliers in Canada (brava!), a truly extraordinary achievement. She had been given a week off as her reward so she wasn't there on Saturday but word is her employers may build her a special tasting room called Jenn's Place where fans of the grape can hang on her every word.)

Meanwhile, we have E11even. Walk in and you are confronted by the communal high-top table, the bar and the wall of screens. Climb the two or three steps into the heart of the space and it feels more like an ultra-modern take on a steakhouse. High-backed horseshoe banquettes offer surprising privacy and a good view of the open kitchen (slanted mirrors let you gaze at the mise-en-place). The ceiling is smoked oak, the supporting columns clad in black leather, and the music is at a tolerable level for die-hard conversationalists. It's packed on game night and there is a palpable vibe, especially last Saturday, with the Leafs just four points away from the play-offs and playing an injury-hobbled Pittsburgh team.

MLSE's Executive Chef, Robert Bartley, and the restaurant's Executive Chef, David Isen, have put together a menu designed to satisfy sports fans' expectations with ribs and a burger prominent and a serious area for steaks. There are extra treats among the appetizers. One can order a plate of bacon all on its own – thickly cut, well-smoked grilled bacon dressed with maple syrup and sherry vinegar – a baconmonger's dream. Or a kobe beef meatball the size of a major league baseball that turns out to be unsurprisingly tender but surprisingly light, lean and fine-grained, served in a delicate, fresh-tasting tomato sauce with a chiffonade of fresh basil and a sprinkling of parmesan cheese.



Ahi tuna tartare

I wasn't so keen on the crab cake – it had a slightly pasty inner texture as if it were bound with uncooked flour (I'm sure it wasn't) – but the tuna tartare was delicious. The kitchen mixes minced and diced pickled ginger with the chopped ahi and moistens it with sesame oil. Diced avocado and a powerful sweet soy glaze make their own contribution while potato gaufrettes are sturdy enough to carry a heap of the tartare into an eager mouth. The fish of the day was also a champion. Chef Isen had wrapped a plump juicy fillet of Pacific cod in bacon (there is a deal of bacon on the menu, thank goodness) and used it as a barricade between a yummy hash of Brussels sprouts and Jerusalem artichokes and a ragout of artichokes and carrots in a tangy chive butter sauce.

But a restaurant like this rises or falls on its meat. Steaks range in price and size from a six-ounce petit filet at \$32 to a 14-ounce dry-aged ribeye (\$49) to a 12-ounce New York strip at \$55. The kitchen buys both AAA Canadian or U.S. beef, depending on quality: right now, the striploin is American, the ribeye homegrown. I ordered the petit filet that came with a lovely crust and a toupée of melting herbed butter together with its own head of roasted garlic. The house-made steak sauce was as pungently tangy as anything from a bottle – a little dab'll do ya.

The signature dish, by customer popularity as well as by chefly intent, is half a roast local, organic chicken, and I can see why. The flesh is fabulously moist and flavourful, the soft skin nicely seasoned. It comes with mashed potato and a mound of spongy stuffing flavoured with chicken livers and herbs. It's big enough for two people to share – and that is the tragedy of E11even: portions are generous but you can't really ask for a doggy bag when you're going on to the game. Nor does one really have room for any of the hearty, unabashedly sweet, American desserts that close the menu – a wicked key lime pie trumping a peanut butter mousse with chocolate sauce, caramel-glazed banana, banana ice cream and graham crumbs.



Peanut butter mousse

There are plenty of pretentious, overpriced places catering to the sports-loving Canadian within walking distance of the ACC. E11even deserves neither of those epithets. It's a merry playground for hungry, well-heeled fans with unnecessarily good food and wine and some of the best service in the city.

E11even can be found at Maple Leaf Square, 15 York Street (abutting the western side of the Air Canada Centre). 416 815 1111. www.e11even.ca.