

James John Café

Opened a few years ago by former Paley's Place bar maven Suzanne Bozarth and coffee connoisseur Ken Yates, the James John Café is more than a neighborhood coffee shop. Weekdays, before crossing the St. Johns Bridge to work in Portland, denizens of the St. Johns neighborhood stop for coffee and a blueberry muffin or hardy biscuit flavored with bacon and cheese. On Friday and Saturday nights they return, joined by curious diners from all over the city, when the café transforms into an elegant dinner house. Then, on Sundays, a full-service brunch brings them back for classics like eggs Benedict with house-cured Canadian bacon, homemade biscuits and gravy, and roast beef hash with perfectly poached eggs and braised greens.

Suzanne oversees the kitchen. She and crew bake the fine selection of pastries for breakfast. They make sandwiches (like her unforgettable Carolina-style pulled pork and slaw), soups, and salads—all offered during lunchtime. And, in preparation for the upcoming week, Suzanne can be found Saturday mornings from March through November at the Portland Farmers' Market, acquiring the farm-fresh produce for the café's four-course dinner to be served that evening.

On nights like these, the space is reminiscent of a low-lit Parisian bistro. Ken mixes drinks and greets guests arriving at 6:00 p.m. for a glass of champagne or martini before the 7:00 p.m. seating. At one such dinner in late April, the menu was a celebration of early spring, starting with a brilliant nettle soup. House-cured gravlax and house-smoked black cod with baby greens comprised the second course, followed by the entrée of roasted spring lamb, new potatoes, and green garlic confit. The grand finale: silky rhubarb panna cotta.

The following morning, light fills the unassuming storefront space, and brunch is served without a hint of the previous evening's happenings. Families, friends, and singles with a book or laptop, filter in and out throughout the day. Some come for coffee, some for brunch, but all are happy that James John Café is in the neighborhood to bestow the option.

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