

MOCKINGBIRD BISTRO (Texas Provence)

1985 Welch Houston 713.533.0200

Don't be misled by the somewhat remote location of this restaurant, hidden away just east of Shepherd in an older residential area. Gourmet Magazine found Mockingbird just after its opening four years ago and dubbed it "a neighborhood gem." Chef/Owner John Sheely, who spent part of his early career working in several of Vail's finest establishments (while skiing every free moment), has put together one of the most exciting menus in Houston. Luncheon selections include Slow roasted onion soup with Gruyere croutons; Crisp calamari with spicy remoulade; Foie gras with pancetta, micro greens, brioche, and tomato jam; Salmon Club sandwich, with avocado, apple bacon, grilled red onions, aioli, and frites; Mediterranean mussels with andouille sausage, garlic, shallots, white wine, and pommes frites. Also available are sides of risotto, sauteed broccolini, creamy polenta, and roasted wild mushrooms. Dinner starter selections include Tuna tataki with seaweed salad, tuna crudo with sweet pepper slaw and tuna tartare; Duck breast salad with green apple, golden raisins, toasted hazelnuts, and hazelnut vinaigrette; and Maine lobster bisque with spiced creme fraiche. Main plates include Sea scallops, pan seared with parsnip puree, sauteed baby bok choy and herb pan jus; Ahi Tuna, pepper crusted and rare with tomato and shallot confit and port wine; Sea bass with tomato/Spanish olive ragout, asparagus, and fork mashed Yukon potatoes; Slow roasted leg and breast of Pheasant, with glazed baby vegetables and foccacia stuffing; and Veal chop with truffle/parmesan risotto, chanterelle mushrooms, and veal demi glaze. Discreet lighting and rich wood decor sets the stage for a special experience.

MIND PUDDLES

2305 Dunlavy (near Mockingbird Bistro) Houston 713.529.6463

This special little establishment combines an art gallery for new and undiscovered and affordable local artists and sculptors, with a European style coffee and tea bar, and an outside deck with soft sofa seating and space heaters...in other words, all one needs to hang out, to see and be seen, and to enjoy life, while surrounded by every sort of artistic expression. In addition to paintings and sculpture, original jewelry creations are attractively displayed in a side room. Alcohol is not served here – strictly speaking – but if one brings a bottle of wine, it will be served graciously with payment of a corkage fee. In addition to the above-mentioned beverages, Mind Puddles also serves Italian gelato, smoothies, Ghiradelli hot chocolate, cheese plates, strudel, designer waters and other beverages, not to mention muffins and pumpkin spice cake. Persian owner Navid Ghedami, a sought-after metal sculptor himself, tirelessly promotes his fellow artists through his charming little gallery, which is an excellent place to go before or after dinner or the theatre. Mind Puddles has become a meeting spot for inside-the-Loopers, and on a recent evening Hankamer met a jazz singer, a financial planner/money manager, a young Italian sous-chef, an inventor, and the international marketing VP of one of Houston's biggest name developers. Most Mind Puddles habitués are friendly and open to chatting with anyone else who has discovered this fascinating little spot.

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Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years.

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