

## JULIA'S BISTRO

3722 Main Street at West Alabama, Houston, TX 77002

The word-of-mouth buzz on Julia's Bistro got too great – especially since it was coming my way from friends with educated palates – so to Midtown I went, with high expectations. I was not disappointed. Instead, after an outstanding lunch of potato chip crusted snapper with tartar sauce on a Kaiser roll, I was back the next evening for dinner. Julia's web site describes its menu as Latin heritage with Mexican / Central & South American / Mediterranean flair. Hankamer describes it as a wonderful collection of highly creative, skillfully prepared, and subtly spiced culinary mini-masterpieces, not to be missed! Both the chef and the owner are from Mexico, but this is emphatically NOT a Tex – Mex restaurant, but rather an excellent example of the sophisticated cuisine one might find in one of Mexico City's toniest neighborhoods. Oven-roasted duck breast with mole sauce, served with arepas and glazed baby carrots; pumpkin seed-crusting snapper, topped with saffron shrimp sauce, served with sautéed yuccas and ginger snow peas; potato crusted lamb stuffed with garlic in a vanilla bean merlot reduction, served with spinach and garlic mashed potatoes...you get the idea. Pretty heavenly. On the light rail line, and four doors from The Continental Club, where we dropped in late for a drink, only to be subjected to two bands with no talent, and lots of fellow customers wearing leather vests over paisley shirts (no way those "shirts" could have been perversely intricate body tattoos?) Emphatically not the way to end a dining experience at Julia's!

## MAI'S RESTAURANT

3403 Milam Street Houston, TX 77002

Only four or five blocks from Julia's Bistro in Midtown, Mai's has been serving wonderful Vietnamese cuisine for over twenty-seven years now, and is something of an institution. Open until 3:00 AM on week nights and 4:00 AM on weekends, Mai's is one of only a handful of restaurants in Houston where one can be served an after-theatre meal or a late-night hangover antidote without a feeling of imposition on the restaurant staff. Mai's menu lists 166 selections, so many that frustration sets in when one realizes that even with a companion only three or four items can be consumed by reasonable diners. Mai's has eleven categories of selections, and following is just a sampling: Vietnamese egg roll, served with lettuce, bean shoots, fresh cilantro and mint, and dipping sauce; rice noodle soup with medium rare beef; vermicelli with charcoal broiled shrimp; rice platter with shredded pork, egg cake, and BBQ pork chop; mustard green vegetable soup with shrimp, pork, or chicken; salt sautéed scallop; beef chunk with curry and coconut sauce; sate chicken with asparagus; and Mai's special spicy garlic shrimp, only to name a very few items. Don't forget to end your meal with a delicious "French" coffee, which you can order to go: strong European coffee mixed equally with condensed milk, poured over a glass full of ice cubes.

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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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