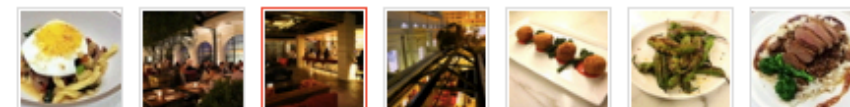




Photos: Inside The Hotly-Anticipated Restaurant At Downtown's Vibiana Cathedral



The bar and lounge are at Redbird (Photo by Krista Simmons/LAist)



Husband and wife team Neil and Amy Fraser have finally opened up Redbird inside what was formerly St. Vibiana's Cathedral, and it's a real looker. Designed by both Amy and Robert Weimer, it integrates midcentury and modern touches into the Spanish baroque bones of the stunning space, which was used to be the rectory of the massive church.

The restaurant boasts a 360-degree bar and large lounge area, with half of the bar partitioned off into the courtyard-style dining room that features a long retractable skylight similar to what you might have seen at the newly revamped Spago or at Sunday brunch staple Cecconi's. (Translation: this place is going to make for epic day-drinking come summertime.)

The menu at Redbird — named after the cardinal that formerly resided there — is as eclectic as the design. Your meal will start with a very welcome complimentary "amuse booze," essentially an aperitif cocktail the bartenders are using to whet your palate before diving into their extensive list of cocktails.

Just like he did when opening Acabar, Julian Cox has trained his team to whip up throwbacks to classics, citing the original recipe origins on the menu, only at Redbird they're with a more market-driven, California twist.

Along with your amuse booze, you'll want to make sure you get at least one order of Redbird's house made bread, also complimentary. The night we dined, the most amazing gluten free cheesy gougeres came to our table in a drawstring bag that looked like Friar Tuck's alms satchel. They were like little fluffy clouds of cheese, and were actually more pillowy than many wheat flour versions.

Fraser's modern American menu ping pongs from Mexican to French to Italian to Southern to Southeast Asian to Japanese, similar to Republique in its admittedly dizzying Modern American sensibility. But his dedication to quality sourced ingredients prepared well is clear, and the dishes I tried were mostly hits. My favorite bite of the night was the potato crusted pork shank, an absurdly delicious bar bite made by rolling juicy, savory smoked pork in mashed potatoes, then frying it and serving on top of a lovely romesco sauce and charred broccoli. Fraser also takes humble hoppin' john to gourmand levels, making the classic Southern dish with duck leg chorizo and expertly seared aged duck breast, finishing it with an addictive Pedro Ximenez sherry reduction.

There are plenty of options available for vegetarians too, like celtuce (a Chinese stem lettuce that looks and tastes like a hybrid between a heart of palm and celery) cooked sous vide and served with a mushroom bread pudding. Another win was the butternut squash cappelletti pasta, also vegetarian, which comes in a butternut squash brodo — another fancy word for broth that you're bound to see popping up on menus or in dedicated stores if L.A. follows the trend of New York, where cups of bone broth are being sold like lattes.

The congregation on the Wednesday night we visited was a little more "upscale working professional" than the young leather-and-stripes crowd you might find at Bill Chait's other Downtown restaurant, Bestia, but the intimate atmosphere was hardly over-reverant or stuffy, just slightly more sophisticated.

Redbird is still in its stages of infancy having only officially opened this week, and after our one visit, it seems to be a welcomed addition to the area. And for what it's worth, the wine list definitely beats what you grew up swilling at Sunday services.

Redbird is located at 114 E. 2nd St., Downtown LA, 213-626-1507