

Todd A. Price
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Review: Café Amelie

EATS



DINING OUT

Café Amelie

Walking the French Quarter's cramped streets, I sometimes glimpsed more expansive spaces. Beyond the clumps of tourists who seemed to have multiplied in recent months, private oases of fountains and foliage hide behind iron gates. I've never been invited into one of these patios. After dinner at Café Amelie, however, I have a good idea what it's like to relax and sip a drink inside a French Quarter retreat.

The imposing iron gates of Café Amelie face the Cornstalk Hotel on Royal Street. A short path, lit by candles, winds past the main house to a cluster of café tables in the heart of the courtyard. At the back of the patio, a cozy dining room offers shelter on cold nights. The clatter of pans escapes from the second story kitchen above the dining room. Occasionally, a cook peeks out to survey the crowd.

The small, frequently updated menu at Café Amelie has touches of New Orleans flavor. A light blond gumbo, for example, is threaded with fringes of shredded chicken and studded with sausage. Although tasty, it seemed restrained compared to gustier gumbos around town laden with seafood and fowl. The kitchen prepares French-style dishes with a light touch. A thick filet of tuna, surrounded by fingerling potatoes, is nicely matched with a sweet honey, sesame and soy sauce. Beautiful lamb chops with a blackened crust are served with a sugary Scotch bonnet pepper jelly that has a wisp of heat. The reoccurring sweet, often fruity sauces on the menu take the place of rich, buttery sauces and give the food a Caribbean lilt.

The prices at Café Amelie can be steep, especially considering the casual service. Entrees range from the low teens to almost \$30. The dinner offerings, however, include a few sandwiches from the lunch menu, such as the tasty pulled pork on ciabatta bread, which make it possible to keep the cost down.

The food at Café Amelie is quiet, almost polite. This isn't bold cooking that will stop a conversation. But who would want the conversation to stop, though, when spending an evening with friends in this lovely space? *912 Royal St., 412-8965, Wed.-Sun 11 a.m.-3 p.m. and 5 p.m. until close.*

—Todd A. Price