

louisville, ky

AN ART SCENE HEATS UP—AND CHEFS KEEP PACE



Blue Dog's egg-topped levain bread. RIGHT: The art-lined dining room at Proof.

Louisville, Kentucky, may be horse-racing and bourbon country, but now it's also food and art central. Many of the best new restaurants, in fact, are near important galleries and museums.

Power couple and local collectors Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson are a force in both the city's culinary and art worlds. In 2006 they helped launch



downtown's fabulous 21c Museum Hotel—an epicenter of the art scene—and its terrific restaurant, **Proof on Main** (702 W. Main St.; 502-217-6360). On a recent night, chef Michael Paley's bison tenderloin (from Brown and Wilson's farm) with Parmigiano-Reggiano stone-ground grits kept my eyes fixed on my plate. That was no small feat given the art in the dining room, like *Zebra Trophy*, Johnston Foster's taxidermy-inspired sculpture of leather, wire and broom handles.

The next morning, I went to **Toast on Market** (736 E. Market St.; 502-569-4099), a new spot in the East Market Street gallery district, for decadent bread-pudding pancakes and stops at the Zephyr Gallery, New Center for Contemporary Art and Gallery NuLu.

Louisville's other food-and-art hubs are Bardstown Road—where renowned local chef Kathy Cary cooks modern Southern food at **Lilly's** (1147 Bardstown Rd.; 502-451-0447)—and Frankfort Avenue, which has an ethnically varied food scene and influential galleries. At the new **Basa Modern Vietnamese** (2244 Frankfort Ave.; 502-896-1016), I sipped a lychee-lime spritzer with my wok-roasted mussels, fragrant with chiles, garlic and basil. Later, I headed to **Sari Sari** (2339 Frankfort Ave.; 502-894-0585), where Filipino chef Lourdes Fronteras serves food from her native country, like a slow-simmered chicken adobo.

Some Frankfort spots are dinner-only on weekends, but I had a fantastic Saturday brunch at **Blue Dog Bakery & Café** (2868 Frankfort Ave.; 502-899-9800). I lingered over poached free-range eggs on grilled levain bread with prosciutto, spinach and Parmesan cheese as I plotted my afternoon of gallery-hopping.

—Emery Van Hook

Kentucky Spirit

The Oak Room's chef, Todd Richards, does great new-Kentucky dishes like roasted scallops in ham-hock broth. At the bar, Jerry Slater (right) mixes a Bufala Negra (bourbon, balsamic vinegar, basil, ginger ale) that wins over bourbon purists (500 Fourth St.; 502-585-3200).

