



**PROOF ON MAIN**

★★★★  
**Address:** 702 W. Main St.  
**Phone:** (502) 217-6360  
**Web:** www.proofon-main.com.

**Cuisine:** Tuscan-influenced American cuisine with regional accents.

**Alcohol:** Full bar; a well-selected wine list includes several dozen bottles (\$25-\$155, with many in the \$30 range), mostly from California and Italy; for quaffing with a meal, quartinos (glass carafes that offer generous portions in the \$10-\$12 range) are bargains — we relished the Feudo Arancio Grillo, 2004, from Sicily (\$10) and the Casamatta Sangiovese, 2004, from Tuscany (\$12).

**Vegetarian:** Limited options (pasta, salads, a few sides), but kitchen is accommodating.

**Good:** Art gallery atmosphere, exquisite food.

**Parking:** Valet parking, \$3; on street after 6 p.m.

**Price range:** Entrees (a la carte) range from \$12 (Proof burger) to \$26 (bone-in bison tenderloin).

**Reservations:** Recommended.

**Credit cards:** AE, Discover, MC, Visa.

**Smoking:** No.

**Access:** Fully accessible to wheelchairs.

**Hours:** Monday-Thursday, 5:30-10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5:30-11 p.m. Bar: Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-midnight; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Hours will expand in mid-April.

★★★★ outstanding  
 ★★★½ excellent  
 ★★★ very good  
 ★★½ good  
 ★★ fair  
 ★ poor

Past columns, directories: www.courier-journal.com



By Mary Ann Gerth, The Courier-Journal

Two of the entrees at Proof on Main are the seared striped bass, front, and the bone-in tenderloin.

# Confident Proof

New restaurant is artful, inventive – heavenly

By Marty Rosen  
 Special to The Courier-Journal

The art that hangs in Proof on Main will either provoke or please you, but it won't fail to capture your eyes and imagination.

Alabaster goats dangle like plump icons from a brick wall. There are disconcerting photos of men and the mannequins they love. A charmingly alarming satyr guards the bar area.

The dining room is one of the most striking public spaces in the city, with a mix of contemporary and traditional elements that manages to be assertive without being abrasive.

Though the connected ZIC Museum Hotel was still under construction during my visits, the Proof kitchen and wait-staff were already confidently in charge of their resources, serving beautifully executed dishes.

And if Proof's focus on regional ingredients is nothing new to Louisville dining, this is nevertheless a formidable restaurant with deep Tuscan influences and one bound to inspire a round of competitive creativity in kitchens throughout the city.

One night, my wife, Mary, and I stopped at the bar for wine and a light meal. A relish tray (\$14) brought intense, simple flavors as safe as a church picnic: roasted beets, radishes marinated in a light vinaigrette, a mild curried cauliflower doctored

with mild peppers, and soft chunks of winter squash in a sweet and sour sauce. A dish of roasted asparagus (\$10) was sinfully delightful: pencil-thin spears touched up with truffles and Parmigiano, and topped with a gorgeous fried egg.

More exotic was baked octopus, served piping hot in a cast-iron pan. The bartenders eagerly told us that chef Michael Paley tenderizes his octopus by simmering it in a broth that includes wine corks (which allegedly contain a tenderizing enzyme). Then he bakes the octopus with oregano, chilies and plenty of garlic until it reaches a gorgeous char.

I started with the thick segments, tender and aromatic, worked my way to the crisp, chewy tentacles, richly soaked in spice, and used a piece of bread (baked on-site) to soak up the spicy scraps stuck to that pan.

Another night, I visited with my old friend John, a Louisville expatriate who has settled in Michigan. We started with exquisite raw dishes. Translucent sheets of yellowfin tuna (\$10) were sprinkled with a spray of currants, capers and tiny garlic chips, as whimsical in appearance as they were bright on the tongue.

Coarsely ground Kentucky bison tartare (\$10) was loosely packed, crunchy with pine nuts and flecked with parsley, lemon and chicory.

Our quick, friendly server told us

we could request shared or split portions, so we had with a pasta course — half orders of airy potato gnocchi in a sparkling Bolognese sauce (\$16) and tender shreds of stewed rabbit served with an adorable tangle of buckwheat pappardelle (\$16).

Our entrees, products of Kentucky agriculture, continued the pattern of excellence. John's seared striped bass (\$20) was couched in an ethereal, multidimensional broth that expressed the very essence of fine Italian cuisine, with hints of lemon and artichoke, accents of marinated tomatoes and the scent of basil.

My braised pork shank (\$18) was served on a creamy bed of grits, topped with tart, green tomato marmalade, and served with a marrow spoon, so nothing would go to waste, was as tender as a spring night.

Even the side dishes (\$5, for sharing) are memorable: kale richly infused with roasted garlic and hot pepper, brussels sprouts seasoned with house-made pancetta.

Sorbets and gelatos are made in-house. We ended with basil gelato and blood orange sorbet.

Or we thought we had ended. As we lingered over latte — and this is a restaurant that calls for lingering — our server brought us more sweets, first a bright cloud of cotton candy, then house-made marshmallows light enough to float us out the door.