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First Bite: Bistro Cacao on Capitol Hill

By Tom Sietsema

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Two Quail is gone, having been replaced in December with [Bistro Cacao](#). Diners who appreciated the former restaurant's dressed-to-the-hilt interior on the Hill (anyone remember the deer head draped with pearls?) will be pleased to find much the same thing in the new place, albeit with fresh paint and flooring and fewer eccentricities.

A waiter greets us in the small entrance and gives us a short tour. "This is the White Room," he says, pointing to the tables not far from the host stand. "Here's the Green Room," he says, a minute and a hallway later. Right next door awaits the Red Room, the most romantic of the three options and the setting we choose. The seats hugging the walls are set off with pillows and curtains and bring to mind a coach on the Orient Express. It's almost *too* cozy, we think as we sink low into our wing chairs.

The man behind the menu is Turkish; his food is French. Kemal Deger says that is the cuisine he prefers, and French is a big part of his résumé: Since coming to the area in the early 1990s, the chef has worked at the late Provence in Washington and at Le Tire Bouchon and La Rue 123, both in Fairfax. Deger shares ownership of Bistro Cacao with two fellow Turks, brothers Harun and Yavuz Bolukbasi, the owners of Meze in Adams Morgan (and the future Ezme in Dupont Circle).

The early verdict? Deger's French onion soup is as it should be, sweet with a swirl of onions and sporting a blistered cap of cheese. I like his pheasant pâté, too, a thin square punched up with gherkins and red onions. Among main courses, bouillabaisse is mild-mannered, however, and some of its ingredients are more equal (read: fresher) than others. Venison is sweet with cherries but shows faint sign of the promised cover of pistachios. The accompanying potato cake is bland save for its flag of rosemary.

Come dessert, be patient: The 20 minutes or so you're asked to wait for the flaky pear tart are worth it.

320 Massachusetts Ave. NE. 202-546-4737. <http://bistrocacao.com>. Dinner entrees, \$14.95-\$24.95.