



## Twin Cities Taste® Dining Guide

### Heartland Wine Bar

1814 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul, 651-699-3536

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WHILE PERUSING HEARTLAND RESTAURANT'S WEBSITE RECENTLY, I discovered Lenny Russo, the meticulous, dedicated, and inspired owner/chef, posts the menus he composes for groups. Clicking on "The Murray McAllister Birthday Celebration," I reviewed the guest of honor's special meal: gingered Hill Top golden carrot-cider soup...Reny Picot Wisconsin Camembert...cherry-walnut tart. I grew jealous. *Next year, I thought. To: Rachel. From: Rachel. Happy*

With its inventive contemporary Midwestern fare and luxe Arts and Crafts d Heartland's only drawback is that you—being Minnesotan—might not feel like you deserve to be there unless it's a special occasion. The anxiety isn't eased by the dining room, which can make you think that if you don't have a wine cellar, and a Mac-Groveland mortgage, you haven't quite earned a spot at the table.

In August, Russo expanded the west side of the restaurant to include a wine bar. But with its short menu of smaller-portioned and more affordable dishes (many soups, salads, cheeses, charcuterie, and *plats du jour* overlap with those in the dining room), the wine bar itself has become a destination. It still feels like a self-conscious caveat. (This is due, in part, to manager Christa Rol who has a gift for putting people at ease with her friendly, knowledgeable a

While the wine bar is packed on weekends, it tends to be slowest on Monday when the restaurant is closed—visit then if you want to feel like you have a chef. At a recent early-evening meal, we started off with the place to oursel Robinson recommended a couple of affordable Spanish reds, then brought a *bouche* of pheasant terrine and pickled kohlrabi—a tiny but representative s Russo's cooking style, which pairs local ingredients in ways that make subtle spark.

A purée of golden potatoes and celery root had a similar sensibility, matched by a generous spoonful of hazelnut pesto that added a delicious, buttery crunch. Heartland's salads tend to be top-notch, but this time, the mâche with fennel cheese, and blueberries was a tad underdressed. The wine bar menu devotes half its space to cheeses and charcuterie: we tried a rosebud-shaped twirl of prosciutto atop pinto beans (perfectly cooked, as if the kitchen staff had timed it with an atomic clock), doused in a tangy-sweet vinaigrette with caramelized and roasted tomatoes.

Heartland's lavish menu descriptions could double as poetry—or science. The "chocolate-black currant-truffle gâteau with whipped crème fraîche, a cardamom clove wafer, green peppercorn-apple cider reduction, and a ginger-oatmeal cookie" was an amazing (and exacting) composition: at its heart, silky dark chocolate was enhanced by the peppered cider's tart, sweet bite. Request that for you

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