

travel

Cuisine cruisin' in downtown Cincinnati

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

Scene One is Mike Fink's riverboat restaurant on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, not far from the mouth of the Licking River.

This is where Cincinnati was born and what gave the town its first name: Losantiville. It's a mixture of French and Latin that loosely means the town opposite the mouth of the Licking.

Scene Two is the Rookwood Pottery restaurant on Mount Adams, one of the seven hills of the city. Here, a daughter of one of Cincinnati's wealthy families established a pottery in the late 19th century. Here, narrow restored houses climb with old-fashioned elegance up the hill overlooking the city center.

Scene Three is the Maisonetie on East Sixth Street, in the heart of downtown, where the Comisar family has consistently earned five-star ratings in the "Mobil Guide" for their traditional French food. The Maisonetie is more than just an excellent restaurant. It is a culmination of the European immigrant dream combined with American know-how in an almost-southern setting.

These are only three of many eating places you can choose if you stay in the slow lane on your way down Interstate 75. They run the taste and price range from hamburgers through raw oysters, to chocolate mousse, but they all say Cincinnati.

MIKE FINK'S is at the foot of Greenn Street in Covington, next to the suspension bridge that curves across the Ohio River from downtown.

Cincinnati. Cab fare, including 50 cents for the bridge, is roughly \$3 from the Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitor's Bureau in the heart of downtown. The paddle-wheeler restaurant was built in 1935 to tow coal and later oil barges, but it has the same romantic look as any Mississippi riverboat. The view is across the river to the skyline of Cincinnati.

The first thing you will see inside the door is the raw bar where a full-time waiter serves oysters, clams, crab legs, snow and stone crabs, shrimps and other fresh seafood by the piece.

The special dinner of the day runs from \$7 to \$10 and the menu ranges from the usual fish and meat dishes found in American restaurants. We chose to concentrate on the seafood, so we ordered a Caesar salad and ate our main protein from the raw bar. It cost 60 cents for a shrimp, about \$3 for a king crab leg.

From here, you are close to Covington, city of churches, and just across the bridge from the tourist highlights of downtown Cincinnati. I recommend that you stop at the tourist bureau for information and walk through the open-side skywalk that runs for several blocks above the main street.

THE SKYWALK starts at Stouffers Cincinnati Towers and hits the Terrace Hilton Hotel as well as the elegant old Nederland Hilton. It's a decent shopping stretch and gives easy access to two other highly rated restaurants: Pigali's and the Gourmet.

It also gives access to Sixth Street and the Maisonetie. This restaurant is marked by a simple awning, and an entrance way that gives you an immediate view into three rooms of diners eating happily, if expensively, under the guidance of the Comisar family.

Manager Michael E. Comisar is the third-generation Comisar to bring the family philosophy to the Maisonetie: "Pay attention to every small detail and the rest will follow." Michael's grandfather came from Russia with his two brothers during the Depression and founded one of the finest restaurant families of America.

The Comisars run four completely different kinds of restaurants here: The

Golden Lamb in Lebanon is the oldest inn in Ohio, and it retains its early American flavor. Chester's Road House, which doesn't take reservations, is a stained-glass-and-music place that particularly appeals to young adults.

La Normandie, downstairs from the Maisonetie, is a peanuts-on-the-floor room of steak and duck legs; the sauces come from the Maisonetie kitchen upstairs, which is a bonus.

The Maisonetie is a no-fooling-around, first-class traditional French restaurant which pays impeccable attention to the details of the table but tries to make the setting comfortable for everybody.

Our dinner, which averaged \$33 a person, included a pate; a filet of brill fish flown fresh from Paris and cooked with a mouseline of seafood and truffles, wrapped in pastry and served with

a white wine sauce; a bib lettuce salad served with the house dressing; and a chocolate mousse a desert-lover would die for.

That price included a champagne cocktail and a bottle of the house wine. Food portions are medium-sized.

If you choose to eat in this downtown area, be sure to visit the historic old city hall with its stained glass windows, St. Peter in Chains Cathedral and the Isaac M. Wise Temple, all within walking distance and located close to one another.

Or go past Fountain Square to the Taft Museum, which has a remarkable collection of paintings in the setting of an old mansion.

AND THEN THERE'S hamburgers at the Rookwood Pottery. They range from basic to with bacon and cheese

and can be ordered with a scrumptious spinach salad and a drink.

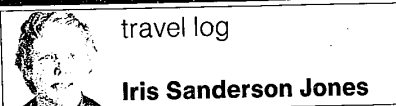
The old beam and plaster building sits on top of Mount Adams, at the end of winding streets that make you think of San Francisco.

Across the parking lot, under the same management, is the Celestial restaurant, "gourmet and good."

Half a mile down the road is the Cincinnati Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, the Krohn Conservatory and the Cincinnati Playhouse.

Other restaurants in Cincinnati which were recommended by local people in and out of the food business are: Mecklinberg's, Selestat and Edwards.

For further information contact the Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitor's Bureau at 200 W. Fifth St., Cincinnati 45202.



travel log

Iris Sanderson Jones

History under glass

A restaurant is often more than just an eating experience. During a recent trip to Cincinnati, where I tried to eat my way through the city on your behalf, I was reminded of another trip to this area and of a restaurant called the El Greco.

The El Greco is in a Spanish-style building in Southgate, Ky., near Covington. It is across the bridge and within easy access of Cincinnati.

I visited the restaurant during a spring meeting of the Midwest Travel Writers in the fall of 1977. The name brings three instant visual memories, two good and one bad.

We visited the restaurant as a prelude to a visit to the Beverly Hills Supper Club, which burned down a short time later.

To this day, I cannot enter a room where tables are jammed in facing the stage without thinking of the people who died there during that fire. That memory is very personal. We were sitting in a position in one of the large rooms where we would probably not have survived that fire.

That's the bad memory. It has nothing to connect it with El Greco except that we visited both on the same night. My memories of El Greco are all good.

TO GET A FEELING for this place, you need only read the blurb they print on their menu, all in lower case: "the Italian restaurant • with the Spanish name • hosted by the Jewish couple • with the Greek partner • featuring American steaks • French onion soup • Ecuadorian ceviche • and Swiss fondue."

The food was good, but the key word in that blurb is Ecuadorian. Around a corner, in one of those Spanish rooms, was a collection of pre-Columbian artifacts that would make a museum curator sick in his breath.

There were cards inside the glass case to show that the collection had been recorded by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., but the most prized part of the experience for me was the story that went with it.

Restaurant owner Jimmy Bernstein once served with the Peace Corp in Ecuador. His job was to help mountain villagers make their living at home, so that they would stop streaming into the cities where they did not do well.

While plowing a field one day, he uncovered some ancient artifacts. According to Bernstein, he made a deal with the Ecuadorian government whereby he would unearth, restore and collect the artifacts. If they would allow him to take them home to the United States, he would contract to return them to Ecuador if a museum was built there within 10 years.

THE ECUADORIAN government, which normally would not allow such treasures out of the country, agreed. The 10 years are up and Bernstein still has the artifacts, although he said in 1977 that he would still return the treasures if a museum were built for them.

In the meantime, he decided to bring them to El Greco so that he could enjoy them. "I'm always at the restaurant and I'm seldom at home. This way I can see them often, and diners can see them too."

So many memories from one brief visit to a restaurant while on the road. I'll probably forget the food and the ambience of the restaurant, and eventually I will forget the fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club, but not that collection of pre-Columbian artifacts, discovered so unexpectedly in an out-of-the-way restaurant in northern Kentucky.

Springtime in Vienna

Some head to the beach to oil it up and lay it down.

Others are off to the mountains, to the slopes to pit their skills against the environment.

Still others, with the aid of Orin Hood of public radio station WDET-FM, will spend April 4-12 in Austria with opera, cathedrals, chamber concerts or gypsy music to fill their time.

Hood, aided by Vienna connection Walter Erhart, has arranged this

eight annual alternative to Miami, Aspen, the Caribbean. The trip includes concert seats, tours of palaces, cities, the Bavarian Alps, Easter Masses at St. Stephen's Cathedral, first class hotels with bath and breakfast, and round-trip transportation from Detroit, including luggage transfers.

The price is \$1,549 (odd \$100 if you're going single). A \$100 deposit is required by Feb. 22.

For more information, call Hood or Bridget Parks at 577-4146.

Professional skiing in Mancelona Sat. and Sun.

The Michelob Midwest Women's Pro Skiing Tour will take to the slopes at Schuss Mountain in competition for \$2,500 in prize money Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 9-10.

The women will be competing for valuable points on the tour standings, aiming toward a \$3,000 grand prize at the end of the season.

On Sunday, Feb. 10, the Peugeot Grand Prix Men's Great Lakes Tour will make its one visit to the Lower Peninsula. The Verre's WML cup will feature dual slalom racing for \$2,500 in prize money. A Peugeot automobile will be awarded to the overall winner of the circuit.

Racing will begin at 9 a.m. both days. The racers must conquer a dual slalom head-to-head racing format, two four-foot jumps and a slope called Kingdom Come.

More information on the professional racing weekend is available by calling Schuss at 1-616-587-9162 or 1-800-632-7170.

Snowline

The Southeast Michigan Travel and Tourist Association's Snowline offers information on cross-country skiing, ice-fishing, tobogganing as well as current winter events. Call 357-2600.

PICK UP YOUR FEET

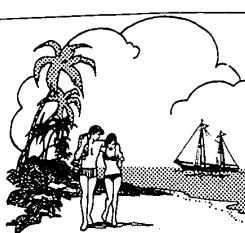


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