

VINTAGE BILTMORE ROOM
Swings to fancy fusion

A beaux arts ball of progressive American food wows, but please fix the seats By Bob Lape

Gary Robins, the Fusion Man, is back in great form at an outstanding new restaurant that does its own decorative fusion with contemporary and vintage pizzazz. The Biltmore Room rings Chelsea's chimes, pumping up a previously blah block with destination dining.

Chef Robins' virtually peerless blending of global inspiration and ingredients—he calls it progressive American cuisine – has been developing New Yorker's plates and palates for decades.



HOT PLATES: Chef Gary Robins (from left) and his partners, Jeffrey Mills and Chris Medeiros, have no problems filling The Biltmore Room's marble dining room.

The Biltmore Room
 807 Eighth Ave.
 (212) 807-0111

★ ★ ★

Cuisine: Progressive American
Wines: 125 choices; sommelier
Dress: No code
Noise Level: Loud
Price Range: \$24-\$32
Wine Markup: 110%-200%
Credit Cards: All major
Reservations: Recommended
Hours: Dinner, Mon.-Thurs., 5:30-10:30 p.m., Fri.-Sat., 5:30-11:30 p.m.

★★★★ = Outstanding
 ★★★ = Excellent
 ★★ = Very good
 ★ = Good

Now a partner in The Biltmore Room, he is guaranteed a long run with food as exciting as it is delicious. It's the kind of place where the most common expression is, "Wow! Look at that!" Followed by Terrific!" First-time visitors often make future reservations before leaving.

As readers know from last week's "New York, New York" column in *Crain's*, however, it may take some planning to get the desired table. Two young entrepreneurs from Boston, Jeffrey Mills and Chris Medeiros, have a hot commodity on their hands with their first restaurant.

The Biltmore Room occupies the ground floor of an 1845- vintage building and is entered through imposing beaux arts iron gates and a bronze revolving door. The zebra-wood bar is jammed with young people, and just beyond the lounge, set apart from it by brass-lined French doors, is a remarkable dining room. **Jennifer Ellen Frank, feng shui consultant helped design and harmonize its elements, drawing you in to enjoy your dining experience.**

The former speakeasy is well dressed in Italian marble from the 1913-vintage Biltmore Hotel. A domed ceiling with glass chandeliers, plus mirrors, a faux fireplace and –despite the marble-soft, romantic lighting warm and complete the visual package. Well, not quite, Good-looking women having dinner there appear to out-number men about two to one. Attention, men!

Unlike many Manhattan restaurants, The Biltmore Room has lighting levels that permit patrons to "read" the food and appreciate the artfulness of its presentation. The real appetizer course (\$10 to \$19) demonstrates chef Robins' skill at **creating feng shui at the table.** Grilled quail is dusted with sumac and paired with pumpkin risotto blended with apple smoked bacon, wilted cress and Parmigiano Reggiano- wicked! Crisp squash blossoms are right at home with a stuffing of Maryland crab, a corn and avocado salad and mango-chili dipping sauce.

Another must-try starter at The Biltmore Room is a brace of giant prawns wrapped in sarong of thin noodles. The prawns are warm, the avocado-tomato salad and mango-mint salsa are cool. Diced red beets in honey-ginger vinaigrette add color and complexity.

The attentive waitstaff does silver-dome service of fish, lamb, chicken and duck entrees, each with a distinctive, often exotic, taste lilt.

Desserts (\$9) rise to the occasion. Passion fruit soufflé and an intense chocolate torte with macademia-praline ice cream are prepared to order. Wafter thin layers of crips pastry support a plethora of impeccably ripe raspberries in a napoleon and ginger ice cream is an ideal send-off for warm pear financier with almonds.

All of the moments here are delightful.