

Good food is written in the stars at Aries

corey e. devine

Remember 43 Brasserie? You don't either? Go figure. 43 Brasserie was Chef Monica Pope's (of Boulevard Bistro fame) poorly conceived idea for a bakery. It shut down after only a few months; however, this lackluster operation did leave something good behind — the building that Aries now occupies. And I must say, the building is the only thing left over from days of yore.

Aries

4315 Montrose
(713) 526-4404

Hours:

Monday-Thursday:

5:30-10 p.m.

Friday-Saturday:

5:30-11 p.m.

Price guide:

Salads	\$5-9
Appetizers	\$5-20
Entrees	\$20-40
Chef's special	\$50
Desserts	\$5-10

Because the menu changes, it's impossible to give exact prices, but this guide should help.

When I first walked in to Aries, I was struck by the beautiful metamorphosis the building had undergone. The crimson walls keep the wood floors from making the space feel too open or expansive. In every part of the restaurant, there's a strong feeling of warmth and intimacy.

The walls, together with the minimalist table and chair sets and soft lighting, create a romantically bare ambiance.

Unlike many of Houston's upscale restaurants, Aries isn't a power-scene. I don't expect to see people doing big business over dinner. Instead, it's a setting for couples or a catch-up dinner with a long-lost friend.

You shouldn't feel at all uncomfortable in a dinner jacket or formal dress here, partly because the lights are so low — this place exudes a glow that makes formalwear seem somewhat appropriate. I wouldn't say Aries is a throwback to '50s boys' clubs where formalwear was expected, but you'll feel much more dapper than silly here.

Parking can be a bit tricky if you don't use the free valet, but why wouldn't you? It's free. It's easy. Just use it. Don't complain that valet is a

hassle — it isn't.

You'll be seated immediately by a hostess who's almost overly friendly. On two of my visits, the chef's wife, Karie, has played hostess. She does such an impeccable job that you'll want to be invited to a party at her home to get a bit more of her hospitality. I suppose more of a draw than the hospitality would be the perfectly prepared food cooked up by her husband, Scott Tycer.

When you're seated, you'll be brought an *amuse bouche* to whet the palate. For those of you unfamiliar with this term, an *amuse bouche* is a complimentary appetizer (a very tiny appetizer) served to "amuse the mouth." Chef Tycer picks whatever is fresh and fun. On one visit I had a tiny potato half topped with beluga caviar and crème fraiche. It was gone in one bite, but what a bite it was.

The menus follow shortly thereafter. The offerings change on a daily basis (as they should at good restaurants), so you're sure to run into some unexplored territory. My advice is to give something that sounds interesting a whirl.

"Aries is a sign of energy, and we want to energize people," Tycer said. "We don't want people to walk out, get in their car and go home to bed. We want them to be stimulated." Chef Tycer has used his experience at Benjy's, Tony's and the Ritz-Carlton to create food that is technically wonderful. Then he incorporates his own imagination to infuse those dishes with creativity. My dining experiences have always been stimulating.

You'll most certainly want to order an appetizer. The pan-seared foie gras is an excellent selection, both for the timelessness of the dish and the modern overhaul the chef has

'We don't want people to walk out, get in their car and go home to bed. We want them to be stimulated.'

— Scott Tycer
Chef, Aries Restaurant

given it. This smooth paté encased in a fried "shell" provides ample flavors for the palate to play with.

The salads are usually excellent as well. My mixed greens with raspberry vinaigrette proved to be better than could be expected. Usually, mixed greens contain too many bitter lettuces; however, Chef Tycer has found a mix just bitter enough to



LAURA WIGINTON/THRESHER

4315 Montrose gets a facelift and a new star sign. Chef Scott Tycer has found a home in his new Aries Restaurant. The food is great, the ambiance is better and his wife is absolutely charming.

balance the sweetness of the vinaigrette. Overall, it's an excellent salad. If it's available, I highly recommend it.

After appetizers this delicious, you'll impatiently await your second course, and a good meal is in the stars. The chef does wonderful things with seafood. I despise most seafood, but I couldn't get enough of Tycer's seared striped bass. He goes to great lengths to make sure his fish is always fresh and never fro-

zen. The freshness keeps the seafood dishes from having any hint of "fishy" flavor, and the texture is always flaky, never mealy. Tycer takes these wonderful filets of fish and gives them life with complex flavors.

If fish doesn't turn your crank, the steaks are wonderful as well. These aren't your typical upscale steakhouse chunks of meat. Chef Tycer is just as demanding about the quality of his meat as he is with his fish.

I tried the New York steak served with bordelaise sauce and goat cheese gratin. I usually don't like steaks that are topped with sauces, but the bordelaise adds a dimension that can't be achieved with the simple pat of butter that usually tops fine steaks. The goat cheese adds a kick that a boring steakhouse steak lacks. After my bout with this Aries invention, I'm left reassessing my original thoughts on steaks.

See ARIES, Page 20

corsages + boutonnières

Finding a corsage or boutonniere for Rondelet can be daunting. You have to pick a color. You have to pick a style. You have to pick the flower. All these options can make the non-horticulturally-inclined-formal-goer's stomach turn. I'd employ the classic rule of design — less is more. Don't go for wildly gaudy designs. Classic designs go a long way in both elegance and aesthetic appeal.

However, don't let classic designs keep you from giving your date something original. Pick a unique flower — one of the most beautiful corsages I ever gave was made of black orchids. I'm not suggesting you'll be able to find rare flowers on such short notice, but ask the flower shop for all the options.

Also, ask what color your date is planning to wear. You can match (or at least coordinate) the corsage or boutonniere with his or her outfit. If your date isn't sure, stick with black and white and possibly red. These classic colors work well. You might also talk to your date about the issue in general. I know a lot of girls who would prefer to receive a bouquet of flowers before the dance than worry about crushing their corsage all night. If the thought of choosing all this makes your head hurt, let the flower shop do it for you. Here are a few close florists:

The Village Flowerery	Albert Miller Florist	Je Ne Sais Quoi
6103 Kirby Dr.	1965 W. Gray St.	2202 Bissonet St.
(713) 523-0600	(713) 529-8721	(713) 522-6117

Children's Museum to host Rondelet

corey e. devine

Change is sometimes good. Last year, the Rice Program Council moved its *pièce de résistance* for spring, Rondelet, to the weekend prior to Beer-Bike, and the change met with rousing success. Once again, Rice students will be dressed in their finest duds for a night out on the town.

"We're hoping to do something really different this year," Lovett College sophomore Katie Southard said. "There's been a lot of talk about this in the past, but this year the location and theme should make the event something to remember." Southard is a member of the RPC formals committee, which plans Rondelet and Esperanza.

The event will be held at the Texas Children's Museum at 1500 Binz St. in the Museum District. This location should provide a great venue for the event.

It's large enough to hold everyone, and it provides a lot of entertaining exhibits outside of the event itself. "Everyone is so excited by the location," said Brown College junior Amie Jan, also on the committee.

"If you're tired of dancing, you can walk around and play with some of the museum's cool exhibits," Jan said. Sure, it might seem a little childish at first (come on people, this is the children's museum), but the venue should provide an interesting departure from second-rate ballrooms and glass chandeliers.

This isn't a signal that future Rondelets will be any less formal than those in the past, but the planning committee wanted to emphasize fun for this year's event.

Towards that goal, the theme of "Love Shack" has been chosen. It's fun. It's crazy. It's so very '80s. If you want to get in on the theme, go to a resale shop and choose some hideous attire.

Guys, think *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. RPC is encouraging men to wear suits to the event if they don't own or feel like renting a tuxedo. "Rondelet is a formal, but a nice suit can go a long way," Jan said.

For girls, formals are important, but you don't have to go out and buy something new. Borrow something from a friend or use something from a semi-formal event.

To make things even better, Houston's favorite ready-made gourmet, Eatzi's, will be catering the entire event. Because RPC is holding the event somewhere other than a hotel, they had the freedom to choose their own caterer. The food should be a real improvement over what was served at the Crowne Plaza at this fall's Esperanza. Expect minicheesecakes, sinful brownies, a lav-

ish fruit display and copious bottles of Snapple at this year's event.

The entertainment is quite thematic — '80s cover-band the Max will be pumping out sounds from the decade of conspicuous consumption all night. The band plays a good mix of '80s and current music.

If you aren't so big on the '80s and think, like me, that it's a decade that should be forgotten, a DJ will be providing an alternative — dance beats all night long.

AIProductions will be deejaying the event. "The biggest complaint we heard about the DJ at Esperanza was that he didn't play enough hip-

hop," Southard said. This DJ company has made a commitment to playing the music that Rice students want to hear. We like different music than other students, and we want to have it played. You can request music that you want to hear at Rondelet on the AIProductions Web site at www.aiproductions.net.

Tickets to the event go on sale in the residential colleges on Monday. They are \$20 each and can be bought from college RPC representatives. Tickets at the door are \$25 apiece.

Corey E. Devine is a member of the RPC formals committee.



Right: The Grand Hall of the Texas Children's Museum where the band for Rondelet will be featured.

Below: The exterior of the Texas Children's Museum — event planners hope that this unique location will draw an unusually large crowd.

PHOTOS BY LAURA WIGINTON/THRESHER



Even Leos love Aries for Rondelet

FOOD, from Page 19

Don't let yourself be limited by the offerings that seem familiar. Try something new — you'll have lots to choose from. I was apprehensive about ordering Moroccan barbecued pousson (baby chicken) with couscous, but I was happy I did so later.

On top of the wonderful fish and steak offerings, Aries will please even the vegetarian. I tried the three-onion bread pudding, which sounds like a desert but is really a wonderful entrée. I couldn't help but gobble up the entire contents of the leek-formed bowl filled with pumpernickel bread held together by a wonderful onion broth. The flavors were complex enough that I didn't even miss the meat.

To end your meal perfectly, try dessert. None here are especially stellar; however, they're all pretty good. Aries has added a pastry chef to its crew, so I have high expectations for the future. Last time I ate here, I tried the raspberry tart with lemon sorbet. I'll agree, you can get good sorbet anywhere. Even frozen stuff out of a carton isn't that bad, but mixed with the raspberry tart, this dessert was light and airy but still sweet. I loved every bite of it. There's also word that the new pastry chef has tweaked the chocolate cake recipe to make it a stand-out item on the menu. Give it a go.

The service at Aries is always quite good. I wouldn't assign it the four-star rating I give to Anthony's, but the staff is young and learning. They often explain the dishes a bit too quickly so that you can't fully understand all the ingredients, or they'll forget to put your napkin in your lap when you sit down. All in all,

however, they don't let your water glass get empty, and they'll pander to your every request. Overall, this maroon-clad army of waiters does a good job of making you feel like a VIP even if you're just a college kid.

A couple of criticisms stick out in my mind: portion size and price. First, you won't leave Aries starving, but you won't need to be wheeled out either. You'll need to have a salad or appetizer to feel full. Even after all that, you'll still have room for dessert.

You should also make sure you have ample purchasing power on that Visa Gold. The entrees at Aries range from \$20 to \$40, and you'll need to factor in an appetizer, drinks and dessert. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the menu's somewhat foreign dishes, a good option is the chef's recommendation. You'll get the best three or four courses the kitchen has to offer, and you won't have to pick them yourself. It's the dummy-proof way to get a great meal, and for what you'll be served, the price is usually well below what ordering all of the entrees separately would cost.

In the end, this newcomer has proven itself to me time and time again. College students only get the chance to splurge on food once or twice a year, and we're rarely dressed up enough to set foot in a restaurant like Aries.

You should take this Rondelet to give Houston's best new restaurant a try. It's pricey, but you'll get your money's worth, and you'll win the adoration of your date. Aries is truly sent from heaven. The prices might be high, but can you put a price on your own little piece of the stars?