



## MOONRISE HOTEL

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# cafe

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## Sky's the Limit

WHEN JOE EDWARDS OPENS A MOON-THEMED HOTEL AND RESTAURANT IN THE LOOP, HOPES ARE HIGH

### Eclipse

6177 Delmar Boulevard; 314-726-2222. Hours: Open daily. Breakfast 6:30-11 a.m. Lunch 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Dinner 4-11 p.m. (Limited menu available 11 p.m.-2 a.m. Bar open till 3 a.m.)

I should be living on the moon by now. I should have my own sleek condo atop a glass tower overlooking the Sea of Tranquility Golf Course, with a launch pad for my jetcopter and a wisecracking robot to do the housework. For fun I would put on my space suit and go to the low-gravity batting cage to hit a few balls

that would make the average Albert Pujols "moon shot" look like an infield fly.

BY  
IAN  
FROEB

This might sound far-fetched now, but if we could go back in time to the heyday of the Space Race, I bet people

would be shocked to learn that, by the year 2009, we wouldn't have colonies on the moon and Mars. Space travel used to be exciting. Astronauts were national heroes. Nowadays the space shuttle is a glorified UPS truck, hauling parts to a space station that makes news only when a) something breaks or b) it is announced that the astronauts living there will be recycling their urine into drinking water.

Oh, sure: Every now and then a probe or a robot sends back cool shots of the surface of Mars or the rings of Saturn, but for human beings, outer space is at best routine and at worst boring.

But maybe — maybe — the Space Age is making a comeback. Witness the success of this summer's *Star Trek* movie, which took its inspiration from the brightly colored optimism of the original 1960s series rather than the dreary, dystopian outlook of most modern sci-fi blockbusters. Now, locally, we have Eclipse, the restaurant on the first floor of the new Moonrise Hotel on the east side of the Delmar Loop.

The hotel and restaurant are the latest offering from local impresario extraordinaire Joe Edwards. As you might expect from the man who has brought St. Louis the Americana-laden Blueberry Hill, the old-school Pin-Up and Flamingo bowling alleys and (possibly) a trolley from the Missouri History Museum to the Loop, Eclipse and the Moonrise offer a healthy dose of Edwards' retro-kitsch aesthetic — the most obvious example, of course, being the giant revolving moon that graces the top of the building.



STEW SMITH

That aside, the exterior is downright bland compared to the restaurant's décor. Here you will find glassed-in displays of moon- and space-related tchotchkes, paintings of ray guns and rocket ships and even tiny green lights hidden in the ceiling tiles that evoke the glow-in-the-dark stars kids stick on their bedroom ceilings.

Order a drink from the swank cocktail menu, and you can almost imagine yourself at a glamorous party to celebrate John Glenn orbiting the planet or Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. I recommend the Blood & Sand, a classic but long-forgotten Scotch-based drink infused with citrus and herbs. The lengthy wine list offers a range of varietals for most budgets.

Eclipse serves breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as a limited late-night menu. I visited twice for dinner and once for lunch. Lunch service is appropriately prompt. Dinner service is a mixed bag: On a relatively slow Thursday evening, courses were brought to the table a little too quickly. On a packed Saturday night, when I had to wait nearly half an hour past my reservation time to be seated, food and especially drinks took a while to arrive. On the other hand, my server offered to comp a round of drinks to atone for the wait.

At the helm in the kitchen are Blueberry Hill executive chef Maurice Reed, along with Wes Johnson and Brendan Noonan. Johnson and Noonan previously worked together at the Shaved Duck in Tower Grove East. I was a fan of their cooking there (see "Quack Addict," July 17, 2008); the duo departed Duck

### Eclipse: One giant leap for the Loop.

at the end of last year, when owner Ally Nisbet shifted the restaurant's focus to a more casual approach. I was excited to hear they were involved at Eclipse.

The menu falls into the catchall category of contemporary American bistro fare, with a nod to local cuisine (t-ravs) and nostalgia-flavored desserts (a blondie, a Moon Pie). The most intriguing entrée is grilled chile quail: one little bird stuffed with a whole jalapeño and served atop jalapeño cornbread in a raspberry sauce, with a side of flash-fried rocket (that is, arugula, though the vegetable's other name is clearly more fitting here). The quail was tender, its flavor spicy but not exceptionally hot. The sauce was straightforward, but its tartness added a welcome kick to the savory, spicy meat.

The kitchen upgrades steak frites from its usual "lesser" cut (such as hanger steak) to a dry-aged rib eye. I might have preferred a touch more char on the rib eye's exterior, but the interior was a lovely medium-rare and exceptionally flavorful. The frites were a rich golden brown, crisp on the outside and fluffy inside. If you want greens, order a salad: My steak was served with three stalks of asparagus.

For that matter, if you want a salad, skip the greens for the combination of shaved fennel and pear, with black olives in a white balsamic vinaigrette. It's a light, flavorful change from the usual.

I had less luck with seafood entrées. Lobster pot pie, which a server told me was the most popular menu item, is "deconstructed": hunks of lobster, peas, carrots and potatoes in a "brandied

lobster cream sauce" with two crescent-shaped puff pastries swimming in the sauce. I'm not sure what purpose the deconstruction served; the presentation was no more enticing than a bowl of soup with a hunk of bread floating in it. The cream sauce was even more problematic, with a strong acrid note — too much brandy? scalded cream? — that cast a pall over the entire dish.

The seafood of the day ("flown in by moonlight") was a pan-seared salmon fillet glazed with brown butter. This was a sensible, if un-inspired, pairing, but accompanying it was a giant lump of goat cheese into which bits of mushroom had been folded. While lox and cream cheese go together like ketchup and fries, the combination of the funky chèvre and the seared salmon was a train wreck, the flavor falling somewhere between overflowing laundry basket and overripe Brie.

I liked the seafood appetizers better. Fried calamari are served with a searing — that's a compliment, if you are a capsaicin freak like me — jalapeño-garlic butter. A lobster beignet is exactly what it sounds like: a deep-fried pastry stuffed with lobster meat, with added sweetness from a scattering of curried onions and a cherry garnish. The beignet, like the grilled chile quail, is one of the few selections that leaps off the menu page. Other than that, there are two chicken entrées (one roasted, the other a penne pasta), trout grilled on a plank and a pork chop; appetizers include a crab cake and shrimp cocktail.

When I went for lunch, I ordered the apple-mustard sliders. The three tiny burgers were undeniably cute on their miniature brioche buns, but what was the point of serving them as sliders? They weren't a repurposed appetizer from the dinner menu. It was just an utterly normal burger unnecessarily dressed up as one of the more inexplicable recent restaurant trends.

Daylight isn't kind to Eclipse's looks, either. The paintings and tchotchkes are best viewed in soft light, and the ugly carpet, the drop ceiling and mismatched furniture designs struck me as chintzy.

Speaking of night and day, Eclipse still seems unsure about what it wants to be. It's definitely not a typical hotel restaurant, and Joe Edwards and his team should be congratulated not only for opening the first hotel in the Loop, but also for making it an idiosyncratic one. The Moonrise Hotel's Eclipse isn't destination dining yet, though. The menu is too generic, its few accents (the deconstructed pot pie, the sliders) mere clichés.

The hotel has the moon on its roof. It shouldn't be too much of a stretch to reach for the stars.

Have a suggestion for a restaurant the *Riverfront Times* should review? E-mail [ian.froeb@riverfronttimes.com](mailto:ian.froeb@riverfronttimes.com). For more about food and St. Louis restaurants, visit [GutCheck.blogs.riverfronttimes.com](http://GutCheck.blogs.riverfronttimes.com).