



Dishes:

Ham and Focaccia Plate,
Mortadella Sandwich, and
Homemade Sourdough Ice Cream

Location:

Chenin @ The Siren Hotel

I remember being in high school and reading a review for A Tribe Called Quest's 1991 album *The Low End Theory* that described it as existing in a smokey, dimly lit room where everyone wears sunglasses indoors and it remains 3am in perpetuity. This brief description was a bastardized paraphrasing of the actual review, which I am ultimately too lazy to actually look up, but the idea still stands. It's something I think about somewhat regularly and when I come across something in the wild that shares that description, time seems to slow down so that I can revel in the beauty of the space's fleeting coolness.

BY MICHAEL HIRSCH

There are certain places that exude coolness. Chenin at the Siren Hotel is one of those places, except the cool isn't fleeting like the smoking basement at an illegal party. You can walk in Monday through Thursday from 5pm to midnight, or Friday and Saturdays when they stay open til a smooth 2am, and bask in that permanent late night cool. Its elegant-yet-minimal decor lends itself to a cozy vibe that you'd find nestled into one of Amsterdam's brick laid back alleys. A small space with an even smaller menu, Chenin calls itself a "small wine bar" and that is as true as it gets. I doubt the place could fit more than 14 full-sized adults at a time and the fact that it doesn't accept reservations means it maintains a frenetic friction that alludes to a bustling tabagie in Paris.

Anything I can possibly say about this is going to sound so terrible and corny but the facts are that I am a terribly corny romance-fuelled person. I'm a sucker for "vibes" and "aesthetics" that make this beautiful decrepit city I love feel transported back to a time when it was constantly buzzing and brimming with potential. Even as the calculus of what the city looks like has changed over time, the pockets like this provide me with some respite from my incessant urbanist-OCD spirals. Chenin is a buzzing candle-lit boudoir of a space.

I like ham and cheese, bread and butter, fats and carbs. I can survive on that. Dead ass, the Michael Hirsch food pyramid (not USDA co-signed by the way) is freshly baked bread, hella butter, hella cheeses, and a variety of Iberian ham, because that peninsula knows their way around a ham. Luckily for me, the barebones menu at this little wine bar is entirely made up of these types of items, and in this particular instance I went with a Mortadella Sandwich and the plate of freshly baked focaccia with thick pad of butter and thinly sliced ham. I am once again going to use this column to deride the overly complex nature of fine dining, because I'd much rather have a sandwich simple like this; its the simplicity that makes it so intoxicating. The pistachio spread on the Mortadella is decadent and never jarring, the thinly shaved mortadella folds like satin curtains, the crunch from the bread brings just enough texture to seduce you into your subsequent bites until suddenly it's completely gone.

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The plate was essentially a deconstructed sandwich for me to play with the ratios of this invariable Holy Three of wine-bar foods. Cultured butter sets the stage for warm and crunchy focaccia. It's simplicity makes it so obvious that I turned my head to make sure the people around me understood what was going on—maximum pleasure. The ham is earthy and rich, patrolling the background like Dikembe Mutombo only to make itself known in its most needed moments. They feed these pigs acorns and you can tell— they're not your ordinary slop jockeys being churned into Oscar-Meyer bacon, no, these are pigs that taste like they wore top hats.

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As someone with IBS, I can't hit soft serve or even a damn Hagen Daz without getting absolutely wrecked. But sometimes you must make sacrifices, which may come in the form of homespun ice cream. Taking the leftover starter from the fresh sourdough, Chenin spins up a magnificent and strange ice cream that's slightly fermented, slightly nutty, and all the way creamy. It was the best part of my meal and the worst part of my day. Next time I'll pack bae and some Lactaid so we can run it up with two scoops instead of one.

A place like Chenin should be, and probably is, considered the most chic little wine bar in Michigan. Unfortunately alcohol spells trouble for my tummy so the wine was something I had to skip out on this time around. However, the imbibing patrons sitting to my left at the candle lit marbled counter assured me the selection was top tier in all forms—natural wines, old world reds, crisp whites...things that make cheese, bread and meat all taste... better. You know the scene in *Ratatouille* where Remy eats the cheese with the grapes and fireworks go off in his brain— that is a real thing that happens to folks when they come here.





**Chenin is located at
1509 Broadway St Suite A-1,
Detroit, MI 48226**

<https://barchenin.com/>