

September 4, 2018

## **TWAIN**

2445 N. Milwaukee Ave., Logan Square  
773-697-8463

2 diners @ 7 pm

cuisine: 1940-60 Midwest cuisine

opened: August 19, 2018

owners: Spouses, Tim Graham & Rebekah Graham, with Branko Palikuca  
(Dawson co-owner)

chefs: Tim Graham (Brasserie Jo, Tru, Travelle) & Rebekah Graham (Publican  
beverage director)

## **THE PLACE**

Deep is the word these days. Another **very deep storefront**.

A **studied industrial look with Midwest touches**. Cement floor and wood tables have a sleek finished look, not to mention spacious. **Tapestry along one entire wall** was created for Twain restaurant to represent dawn to dusk along the Missouri (?). (I thought the waiter said the Michigan but I think he meant the Missouri.) Kind of a wildlife odyssey.

Attractive **bar** area in front, and it so happened that Billy Lawless (Gage, Acanto, et al) was there treating his staff to some drinks *and* playing bartender! Billy Lawless is a hoot!

Looks like there is going to be a lovely **enclosed patio** out back.

## **THE MENU**

**Mom is written all over this menu**. Definitely **1950s home cooking with some twists** thrown in. I mean my mother made Ants on a Log (celery stuffed with cream cheese and dotted with raisins), wedge salad for which she mixed her own Thousand Island dressing (blue cheese was not on her radar), and Pigs in a Blanket (baby hot dogs wrapped in Pillsbury dough and baked in the oven). These **classics are on Twain's menu, in name only**. I mean my mother, nobody's mother who I knew, stuffed celery with duck liver peanut butter mousse, or roasted tomatoes for the nightly iceberg lettuce salad.

So it's playful food from the 50s. I can live with that.

## THE SERVICE

The place is pretty darned new, and **staff was on its toes**. If anything, staff was *too* attentive, but I am quite sure they will all settle in. Friendly enthusiasm. Chef and manager visiting tables. Just a smattering of people on this night.

## THE MEAL

### House cocktails

*Jam Jar* \$10

Marmalade, Celebration Aquavit, curaçao, lemon, lime

This sounded more entertaining than it was and the **marmalade kept sinking to the bottom**. Needs work.

*Shrimp cocktail* \$13

Letherbee gin, spiced lime cordial. prawn

I had to order this for the name alone. Funny that no one has ever come up with this “cocktail” play before—anyway not in my experience. **Briny flavor was kicky. I wish the shrimp had been a bit more tender.**

### Appetizers

*Ants on a Log* \$9

Celery, duck liver peanut butter mousse, bourbon cherries

**Trendy riff on a 50s fave** and that alone made it a fun dish. I would have liked more of the mousse or a more flavorful mousse or something. In the end, **more conceit than delivery**.

### Soup/Salad

*Shaved carrot salad* \$8

Thinly shaved carrots, charred poblano dressing, sunflower seeds, lime

This salad stepped out of the announced time zone. Seems to me shaved salads are a much more recent phenomenon than the *Mickey Mouse Club*. Good job with **varying textures and colors**. **Poblano dressing was really intense**. The lime offered a welcome cool down, but the spice here definitely lingers on.

### Main course

*Great Lakes perch \$17*

Dredged with cornmeal, crispy potato, coleslaw, lemon

This was **my favorite bite of the night**. I predict it will become a signature item. Generous basket of four or five **perfectly fried perch fillets**. Boneless, of course. Cornmeal breading can be too dry and stiff but when it's done right, it's a treat. Twain did it right. (Anyone remember Phil Smidt's?)

Sorry folks, I fell down on the job and skipped dessert. Listen to the Podcast and Nagrant will tell you what he had for dessert.

## **THOUGHTS**

Twain has one of those menus that make me wonder about menu writers. I get that it's trying to be downhome friendly, evoke a different era, and play with our memories. That said, corn sticks on the same menu with chilled cantaloupe and champagne soup threw me for a loop. I found it **a little tricky to put a coherent meal together**.

PRO TIP: I know what a Sloppy Joe is, and the name has never bothered me. You know, it's a childhood classic. But "Sloppy Marrow" just sounds sloppy.