

RESTAURANT UPDATE

Marfreless

2006 Peden, Houston 77019 713.528.0083

(Unmarked blue door in the east wall of River Oaks Theatre under the fire escape, and next to the I Do, I Do Bridal Store)

Operating under the radar of most for over 35 years without any signage or identification other than a blue door, this eclectic, windowless, speakeasy-type saloon has a unique reputation among Houston watering holes. At one time known exclusively for its oversize sofas and very dim lights in the small loft-like area, it is now more of a neighborhood bar patronized by a wide variety of characters, although serious making out upstairs is still said to occur. Patrons' comments online range from "a great date spot" to "regal speakeasy" to "secret rendezvous for couples" to "funky obscurity," and regular and occasional visitors alike attest to the generous cocktails and selection of single malts. Marfreless-no idea the origin of the name-is a definite "must visit" if for no other reason than it is a Houston icon. And while you are there, especially if you stroll upstairs, you will realize that the people watching is like few other spots in Houston !

La Madeleine Country French Cafe

Fourteen Houston Locations, including Westheimer at Loop 610, Kirby Dr. at Amherst,
West Gray at Shepherd, and Woodway at Voss

I love La Madeleine. It is a place where no one cares if you stay all day at your table, relaxing, working on your laptop, sipping coffee, or just hanging out with friends. Think 'Starbucks with good food in a light French atmosphere.' Homemade soups include Tomato basil, French onion, and a soupe du jour. Fresh salads are Spinach salade with chicken, fresh spinach with mushrooms, roasted pecans, bacon, red bell peppers, and strawberries, tossed with balsamic vinaigrette; Mediterranean salade, cucumbers, tomatoes, green onions, eggs, artichoke hearts, olives, and feta cheese, tossed in a marjoram-infused vinaigrette. French specialties are Chicken friand, puff pastry filled with chicken, mushrooms, and bechamel sauce; Quiche lorraine, eggs with ham, bacon, and Swiss cheese in a delicate pastry shell. On the Hot and cold sandwich menu are Chicken salade croissant, served on fresh baked croissant with mayo, lettuce, and tomatoes; French dip, roast beef on a sourdough roll with provolone and horseradish sauce, served au jus; Croque monsieur, classic French ham sandwich with garlic cream sauce and Swiss cheese. Savoury entrees include Rosemary rotisserie chicken served with rice Provençal and steamed broccoli; Herb crusted pork Florentine, pork loin stuffed with delicate spinach stuffing with pesto, crusted with rosemary Parmesan bread crumbs atop garlic cream sauce, serve with rosemary roast potatoes and green beans almondine; Beef Bourguignon en croute, tender wine-marinated beef in rich brown sauce served with carrots, pearl onions, broccoli, rosemary roast potatoes, and a flaky puff pastry. Crepes are also on the menu: Chicken crepe Riviera ; Beef crepe maison, Shrimp crepe Florentine; and Crepe Romanoff, sweet crepe served with fresh strawberries, brandy sour cream sauce, and cinnamon. La Madeleine serves a hearty breakfast menu, including Quiches, American breakfast, Country French breakfast, Cinnamon French toast, Egg crepe champignon, and Custom Omelette...sides are Smoked bacon or sausage and Potato galette, baked crispy potato cake with green onions and herbs. A large variety of home-baked pastries is always on display, and they go exceedingly well with the Specialty coffees, such as Espresso, Cafe Americano, Cappuccino, Cafe latte, Cafe mocha, Caramel Macchiato, and Hot chocolat.

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Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years. The opinions expressed in Hankamer Commercial RESTAURANT UPDATE are the opinions of Hankamer only and these opinions may not be shared by RED News or any other advertising medium in which UPDATE appears. Copyright 2007 Ray Hankamer, Hankamer Commercial/Hankamer & Associates.