

CAFÉ MONTROSE

1609 Westheimer Road, Houston, Texas 77006 www.cafemontrose.com

I've been waiting all summer for the first cold, rainy night (Belgian weather) so I could go back to this little jewel of a restaurant and pack in an iron kettle full of moules marinières (steamed mussels in white wine served with delicious French fries). To our knowledge the only Belgian restaurant in Houston, family-owned Café Montrose is tucked away in a little strip center and has been dispensing hearty dishes, strong and spicy Belgian Trappist beer, and good wines – to a background of Jacques Brel and Edith Piaf music– for a number of years. The sometimes quirky staff has a contagious sense of good humor, engaging new and regular customers alike with good-natured banter, while rolling out the steaming dishes. On a recent Monday night (Halloween), Café Montrose was packed, with a small banquet also going on in a side room, and one of the servers was decked out in full witch's garb. Besides the signature mussels, Farmer's Terrine and French onion soup are available for starters, along with German cucumber salad, Belgian endive salad, and a wonderful "Salade Compose" (mixed salad). Main courses include Flemish Beef Stew cooked with Beer, Salmon Ostendais (steamed with shrimp, mussels, and mushrooms in cream sauce), Lamb Stew with Vegetables, and Filet Mignon with Bearnaise, mushroom, or Roquefort sauce. If this has not been hearty enough, dessert choices include Dame Blanche (vanilla ice cream with hot Belgian chocolate), Mocha ice cream with coffee, and Belgian dark chocolate mousse. And don't forget to experiment with the wide choice of Trappist beers – the Trappist monks are the ones who take a lifetime vow of silence when entering the monastery, all except one: the monk designated to be the business manager of the monastery's brewery!

MAMA'S CAFÉ

6019 Westheimer Road, Houston Texas 77057 www.mamascafe.net

I like restaurants which have 'stood the test of time,' since it means they understand their customer base and remain true to it, while at the same time evolving their menu so that everyone in a given dining party can find something special to them on the menu. Originally rolled out as a 'country cooking-comfort food roadhouse-in-the-city,' Mama's now features such items as Blackened Chicken Pasta Alfredo, Combo Mexican Platter, and Fajita Taco Salad alongside the old favorites such as Texas-sized Chicken Fried Steak, Pork Chops, and Mama's Homemade Meatloaf, with sides such as frijoles, black-eyed peas, spinach, corn, and steamed broccoli. Other examples of the variety of the menu of the restaurant which is now Mama's include Mama's Famous Liver & Onions, Grilled Catfish Platter, Chicken Chalupas, and Fried Chicken Tenderloin Platter served with red-skinned mashed potatoes, southern cream gravy, and one side. You get the idea: something for everyone, "Homemade, Homestyle, for Thirty Years." And very importantly: Mama's is open late, so that after the party you can drop in for a light snack of Huevos Hofbrau (migas cooked with fresh chilies, pico de gallo, onions, and crushed tortilla chips), Eggs Benedict Mexicana (English muffin and Canadian bacon topped with chile con queso), or Texas-sized Breakfast Tacos, all washed down with fresh squeezed orange juice or a mug of steaming hot cinnamon coffee.

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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.

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