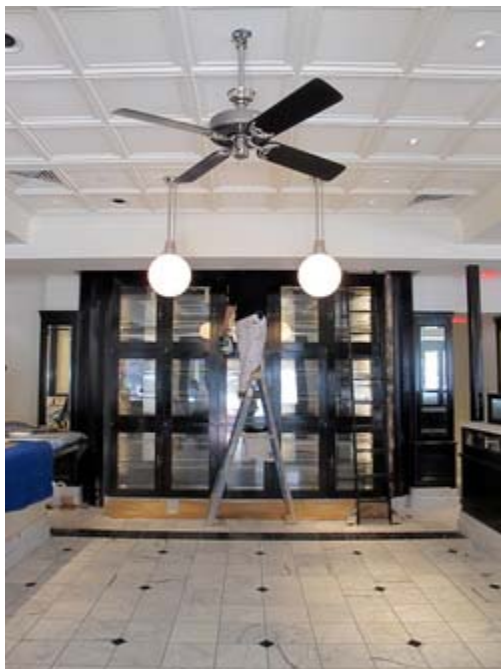


## A First Peek at Café des Amis



*Exterior.*



*The bar area, and its extensive wine storage.*



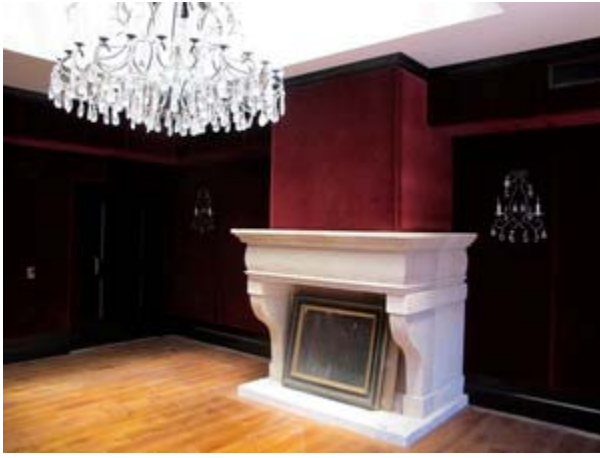
*The bar of solid, poured zinc.*



*View of the main dining room.*



*Stairs to the back dining room.*



*Limestone fireplace and mohair walls in the back dining room.*



*Chandelier and skylight.*



*Vintage artwork for the back dining room.*

In a season of high-profile openings (Wayfare Tavern, Prospect), let's examine the third heavyweight to enter into the ring, **~CAFÉ DES AMIS~**. This long-awaited project from the Bacchus Management Group (Spruce, Village Pub, and more) and Perry Butler is opening July 21st in Cow Hollow. The former Prego space is nostalgic to many (I remember it was one of the “special lunch in the city” locations my parents would occasionally take me and my sister to), and it will be fantastic to have a lively restaurant anchor this corner once again.

I got a chance to tour the space last week, and it's quite a beaut. The 7,000-square-foot location was designed by Stephen Brady (Spruce) and architect Anthony Fish. The light-filled 200-seat space has sweeping doors that open into the bar area, where the 25-foot bar is a solid pour of zinc (the craftsmen, **Ateliers Nectoux** in Paris, only do a few of this kind a year). It's stunning, with its curving edges, and room for around 18-20 people, plus there will be a number of cocktail tables, and classic woven brasserie chairs in black. Marble is everywhere, from the floors to the bar counters—and not just any marble, but Carrara marble (hey, if it's good enough for Michelangelo...). You'll also note a lot of mirrors, and shiny, black lacquered wood, which will be counterpointed in the main dining room with lipstick red leather banquettes. When the floor-to-ceiling glass French doors are open, there will be three rows of sidewalk seating, 17 to-be coveted tables in all. The flickering gas lamps, both inside and outside, are a one-of-a-kind feature; this will be the only place in San Francisco where you'll see working gas lamps (partner Tim Stannard was able to add this unique feature due to the tiniest of loopholes that he found—and he will never say where or how, so don't ask).

In the back is a stairway leading to an elevated room, quite glam with bordeaux mohair panels and crystal sconces, a massive chandelier by Brady that was originally designed for the Ralph Lauren store in Moscow, and a French limestone fireplace that was reassembled here by a master stonemason. There's soft light from the overhead skylight, a small Juliet balcony, and a ballroom feel with reclaimed tobacco oak floors—the room definitely has a tony vibe, and will look over the main dining room below. The walls will feature framed French cartoons from the '20s and

'30s (see the picture). The 40-seat room is sure to become the hot private room rental (there will also be a couple loveseats and c-shaped oval tables at the top of the stairway that will be sexy and in-demand little nooks).

So, the scene is set—you ready to learn about this menu? Quite the team has been painstakingly assembling the brasserie-inspired menu: Bacchus Management Group's chef/partner Gordon Drysdale, executive chef Ed Carew (Cottage Eatery, Florio), and chef de cuisine Justin Deering (CONDUIT). While the restaurant will just start with dinner service, it will ramp up and be open all day and night, serving breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a late-night menu.

A preliminary peek at the menu includes classic dishes that span many French regions, from a salade lyonnaise to a Niçoise; a brandade de morue fumé with celery and parsley salad; sardines escabeche over ratatouille and a charred pepper purée; a charcuterie program with rillettes and pâté campagne—it will grow to be quite extensive (eventually 10-12 selections); seafood like sand dabs meunière with potatoes and crème fraîche; a killer flatiron steak frites; and house specials like choucroute garni (braised bacon, smoked pork loin, and housemade frankfurter with housemade sauerkraut) or a côte de boeuf for two with béarnaise, bordelaise, marrow, and frites. There will also be rotating weekly specials, like Thursday may feature blanquette de veau, and cassoulet on Sundays. Prices will range from \$9-\$11 for starters (\$17 for a foie terrine), and \$17-\$29 for entrées.

The raw bar is going to have a fantastic selection, perhaps one of the best in the city, with a variety of oysters (look for an extensive East Coast lineup), clams, mussels, spot prawns, crab, urchin, and lobster. The late-night menu (starting at 11pm) is especially exciting to me, creating the possibility of having steak tartare or onion soup gratinée at midnight on a Thursday—plus incredible-sounding dishes like hay-braised ham croquettes with sweet peas and béchamel, snails in bordelaise-Blue Ribbon style, or sea urchin with pork butter on brioche. *Mon dieu.*

The restaurant will be using whole pigs from Becker Lane, Creekstone for the beef, and of course quality local and organic produce, much of it from the group's nearby SMIP Ranch. The breads will come from Bacchus's [Mayfield Bakery](#) in Palo Alto (including croissants in the morning), and the artisanal coffees and teas from their [ROAST Coffee Company](#).

Speaking of beverages, Bacchus's wine director Andrew Green (working closely with lead sommelier Skye La Torre) is offering a 500-bottle list composed almost entirely of French wines, with many from obscure towns and featuring good pricing, as well as a few domestic selections "from friends." There will also be 35 beers, with 10 on tap (look for some small artisanal French and Belgian selections). Cocktails will be based on Parisian interpretations of American cocktails, with an 1800s flair—Brandon Clements, the bar manager at Spruce, oversaw the spirits program here. You'll find cocktails like a Vieux Carré, The Corpse Reviver #2, and of course a French 75. There will be plenty to cheers with at this swanky and sure-to-be-a-hit brasserie when it opens for dinner on July 21st. Hours will (eventually) be breakfast daily 8am-11am, lunch 11am-5pm, dinner 5pm-11pm, and the late-night menu Thu-Sat 11pm-1am.

at [Café des Amis](#) on [Jul 9, 2010](#)