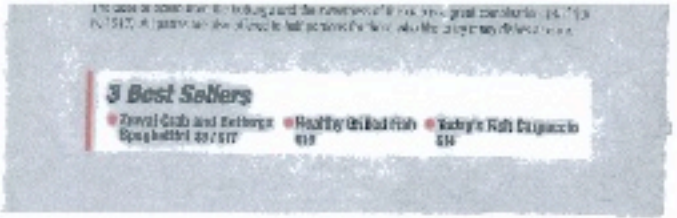

Greenwich Grill

★★★★½

428 Greenwich St between Laight and Vestry Sts (212-274-0428). Subway: 1 to Canal St. Mon–Thu 11:30am–2:30pm, 5:30–10:30pm; Fri 11:30am–2:30pm, 5:30–11pm; Sat 5:30–11pm; Sun 11:30am–4:30pm, 5–10pm. Average main course: $20.

Greenwich Grill features the sort of Continental cuisine—a mix of "Californian, Italian, and traditional French," as the website describes it—that you might find at an old-fashioned tourist hotel in Tokyo (it is in fact part of a hotel and restaurant conglomerate). Though that doesn't sound like a compliment, it's not a bad thing, either. Despite its institutional-lobby feel, with a classic jazz soundtrack, clubby brown leather banquettes and tall mirrors reaching up toward a soaring ceiling, the muted dining room is attractive, and the all-Japanese staff attentive. The menu features French onion soup and seafood ceviche among other mismatched dishes, all filtered, effectively, through a Japanese lens.

The most unexpected thing about the eclectic bill of fare is how across-the-board tasty it is. Beautifully seasoned asparagus spears "Milanese" come topped with a fried runny egg and a rich caper-Parmesan dressing. An offbeat risotto—more Asian than Italian—gets its creamy texture and salty finish from silky sea urchin and chopped fresh seaweed in place of butter and cheese. A fine fork-tender hunk of grilled Wagyu beef from Australia anchors a wholesome entrée of steak, salad (baby arugula) and potato (caramelized cubes). Fried "Cajun" lobster—among the strangest and most delicious things on the menu—is like batter-free tempura, featuring the subtly spiced, sweet, succulent crustacean flash-fried in its split shell. The dessert selection includes all the usual Continental suspects—from creamy tiramisu to an especially oozy, classic molten chocolate cake. It adds up to one of New York's most unusual restaurants—offering an authentic Japanese experience without serving much food from Japan.—*TONY*

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