

SUPREME FOODIE DESTINATION

THE EPICUREAN HOTEL TAMPA
BY RAY COLLINS



EXCLUSIVE

I have been enamored by Tampa's Hyde Park for 30 years. It's clean, hip and has beautiful tree-lined streets full of beautiful old houses.

Mainsail Lodging & Development was brilliant to develop a hotel in the vibrant "SoHo" district—which stands for South Howard. A perfect place to spend a weekend.

The Epicurean is directly across the street from the world-famous Bern's Steak House named after founder Bern Laxer in 1956. That non-descript white restaurant is next door to a building that holds 650,000 bottles of wine. Consequently, the hotel has a theme that appeals to foodies and wine lovers. (Bern's has partnered with the hotel and even developed specials like a "Bern's Steak-Cation Package" as well as a "Foodie's Dream Escape.")

The name Epicurean comes from the Greek philosopher Epicurus who believed that "pleasure is the greatest good." Smart guy.

There's no mistaking the theme as you walk in the lobby and the clerk greets you with a glass of wine. The hotel is decorated to reflect the culinary theme at every turn. Even the numbers by the side of the elevator resemble a measuring cup!

The hotel's 137 rooms are a blend of urban chic and comfort. Erin and I had a room overlooking Howard Avenue with a king size bed, a kitchenette area and a bathroom with a trendy sliding 'barn-door.'

We unpacked our bags, went downstairs and took advantage of the bicycles at our disposal. The Epicurean is a couple blocks from Bayshore Boulevard—and Erin and I rode all the way through downtown and to the end of the new Riverwalk at Armature Works. So impressive what the City of Tampa has accomplished.



Okay, I'll admit it—we also took a side-trip through Davis Islands to see the Derek Jeter “house” where Tom Brady stayed during the season. Houses around had signs in the front yard that said, “My neighbor is a G.O.A.T” (Greatest of all-time) with a picture of a farm animal.

Back to the hotel, we found the sparkling clean pool and cooled off after our long bike-ride. I must admit, it was a cool scene—a lot of young people enjoying the afternoon. No crying babies to be found. There's also a fitness center with free weights and cardio /weight machines.

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We went upstairs for a pre-dinner drink to watch the sunset over South Tampa. The rooftop bar is called EDGE Rooftop Cocktail Lounge and it offered a stunning view. A menu of small plates, artisan cheeses and charcuterie were available—but we just had our favorite drinks, Tito's for her—Crown for me—and headed downstairs to dinner. Elevage SoHo Kitchen & Bar is located just off the lobby—and is an amazing restaurant. Frankly, I had no idea about the whole 'foodie' theme. The hotel's location in the Hyde Park area already impressed me. The fact that this restaurant is a 5-star experience is absolutely an unexpected bonus to say the least.

Erin had the Burrata salad then the Bison Ribeye with Polenta. I had a Wedge salad then the Filet Mignon and a baked potato. We split grilled charred asparagus and crispy Brussels. Frank, the excellent waiter, recommended a bottle of Belle Glos Dairyman Pinot Noir. For dessert, we each had a dish of gelato. Excellent from start to finish! We went back upstairs to the rooftop for a nightcap. Turns out EDGE is the place to be for young people in the area! Who knew? Fun!



The next morning, we went back to use the bikes again and rode around the streets of Hyde Park. So many beautiful streets and old houses. Lots of young families out having fun on a Sunday morning. Really a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting.

We returned to the hotel and had a great brunch at Elevage. We even sat at the same table! (It worked well the night before!) Being gluten-free, I seized the opportunity to have a Cuban sandwich with fries. Erin did the same. We got up to leave and Jorge, the waiter, said, "No dessert?" You've never seen anyone sit back down faster! More gelato to end our fantastic dining experience.

I've had the opportunity to review dozens of resorts and restaurants over the past ten years as a travel writer, and our experience at Epicurean was one of the best. The location of the hotel as well as the customer service and amazing food combined for an unforgettable weekend.

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