

THE ESSENTIALS

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Church & State



photo by Anne Fishbein

Long before the grungy factory quadrant of downtown became hip, **Church & State** was drawing food lovers there to dine on outstanding versions of classic dishes, turned out by a series of exceptional chefs. Since Tony Esnault — Loire Valley native, Patina alum, protégé of Alain Ducasse — took over the stoves, the food at this French bistro, always very good, has gotten even better. Esnault has a light touch and a phenomenal mastery of technique, whether he's making a bouillabaisse, a delicate dish of farmers market vegetables (the man loves vegetables), an Alsatian tart or a towering holiday *croquembouche*. The wine list is excellent, the breads are from nearby Bread Lounge, and the setting — exposed loft ceiling, open kitchen, strung-up sparkly lights, French scrawled on wall-mounted chalkboards — will make you swear that you're in a Parisian temple to *bistronomie*, not a few miles down from San Julian's skid row. Watch the chefs playing in the tiny kitchen. Don't forget to order the marrow bone and the escargot.

-- Amy Scattergood