

## Big Frenchy

Church & State Bistro gets a boost from Tony Esnault

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Duck à l'Orange | Tony Esnault (Photos: Church & State)

For a city that's undergoing such a dramatic culinary renaissance, Los Angeles has a surprisingly small contingent of French-born chefs.

Even rarer are French chefs cooking classic bistro food. One happy exception is at **Church & State**, the perpetually bustling Downtown bistro in the Arts District, where former Patina chef and Loire Valley native Tony Esnault has taken over the kitchen.

The Alain Ducasse disciple developed a formidable reputation at **Patina**, where he was known for his deftness with farmers' market vegetables. At Church & State, he's returned to his classical roots.

It's wise to begin with a wooden platter of his charcuterie (\$17), a gem-like array of vinegar-tinged head cheese, cured pork belly, velvety pork rillettes and a *quenelle* of robust chicken liver mousse.

A light chicory salad perked with fresh citrus segments (\$15) contrasts with a stellar French onion soup (\$11) blanketed in melted Gruyère.



Chicory salad with citrus

Entrées could have been pulled directly from an Escoffier tome: Canard à l'Orange (\$36) is presented as a fan of tender pink slices of breast and confit leg, drizzled with a balanced sauce lightly perfumed with orange. Steel pans of sumptuous cassoulet (\$32), stocked with plump garlic sausages and tender white beans, make you long for a blustery day.

In true Parisian fashion, service from your well-groomed waiter can seem brusque and aloof, but end your meal by cracking a spoon into a perfectly executed *crème brûlée* (\$9) and all will seem right with the world.