



GINA'S RESTAURANT & BAR

BY RICH BELMONT

Lately I have been taking the 30 minute drive from Dubuque to Platteville a lot. That's because I have discovered Gina's Restaurant & Bar. Well, ok, I didn't discover it. The truth is I was told there was a great new place to eat in Platteville by 365ink publisher, Bryce Parks. That guy likes to eat so he always knows where all the good places are.

Gina's serves Contemporary American Cuisine with French influence. It features two menus in one: an upscale casual bar food menu on one side and outstanding, unusual fine dining entrées on the other.

It's in a really interesting building too. The newly restored Fritz Hoppe Building was built in 1907 in the style of Greek Revival architecture. Mr. Hoppe was the owner of the Platteville Brewery on Mineral Street. He opened this building on Second Street as a bar so patrons could sample his brewery's beverages. Back in those days, the bar was known as a Tied-House. The term came from Great Britain's pubs which were drinking establishments formally called Public Houses meaning "open to the public". In the United States pubs were often called saloons and many of them were Tied-Houses. Breweries usually had exclusive contracts with the saloons so they could only serve beer from their contracted supplier. In effect the saloon was tied to the brewery. Fritz Hoppe's bar only served Platteville Brewery beer.

The building continued to be a bar right up until the time it was purchased by Yag Jha and his wife Regina Pauly. Then Yag and Gina took three years to completely renovate the entire building. They installed all new electrical wiring, plumbing and a new commercial kitchen. Gina, who has been a librarian at University of Wisconsin Platteville for 15 years, researched the décor and designed it to look the way it would have been in 1907. She was able to keep the original bar (but added a new granite top), the tile floor, the back bar, and the tin ceiling. A part of that ceiling had to be duplicated and that was expertly accomplished by Brian Greer's Tin Ceilings from Petersburg, Ontario. The tapestry on the wall is a tribute to Yag's Indian heritage. The building is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Yag and Gina officially opened their restaurant on March 15, 2014. Yag named it in honor of the most important person in his life. Yag was destined to become

a great chef. He was born in New Delhi and moved with his parents to the Bronx, New York when he was 3 years old. When he was 12 he began working as a busser and dishwasher at Dominick's on Arthur Avenue (Little Italy) in the Bronx. Margie and I have been to Dominick's several times. It is considered one of the best Italian restaurants in New York. Yag was promoted to cook and remained at Dominick's for five years.

He moved to Platteville to study at the University of Wisconsin where he received his degree in Business Administration. While at UWP he lived in the upstairs apartment in the Fritz Hoppe Building he now owns. While there he formulated his plan to acquire more culinary experience and then turn the bar downstairs into a restaurant. He cooked at both the French Country Inn and Abbey Resort in Lake Geneva, WI and then did eight years at the now closed Grenadier's in Milwaukee. I have fond memories of dining at Grenadier's. It was a black tuxedo and white glove formal French restaurant. It was considered one of the finest restaurants in the Midwest and was the recipient of a Michelin Star. Yag trained under renowned Executive Chef Knut Apitz. Yag served as the youngest Captain the restaurant ever had.

Fun Fact: Michelin Stars are highly coveted by chefs all over the world. Some find it amusing they are awarded by Michelin, the tire company. But the fact is Michelin published its first guidebook in France in 1900 in order to encourage people to travel in their cars and wear out their tires. The Michelin Travel Guide has a full time staff of anonymous reviewers and does not accept consumer reviews. Most restaurants in the guide receive no stars and only superior ones are awarded 1 to 3 stars.

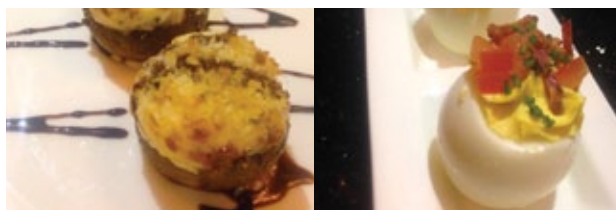
Yag continued his culinary journey by cooking at The Edgewater and Nadia's both in Madison. At Nadia's he was protégé of the celebrated Executive Chef, Abdul Bensaid.

Chef Yag's cuisine is fabulous and you can say it's because he has had some excellent training. But it's also because he possesses a talent for cooking only a privileged few possess. Well, it's all that and his exquisite application of seasonings he learned from his mother. In all of Yag's creations his use of various flavor are always in harmony.

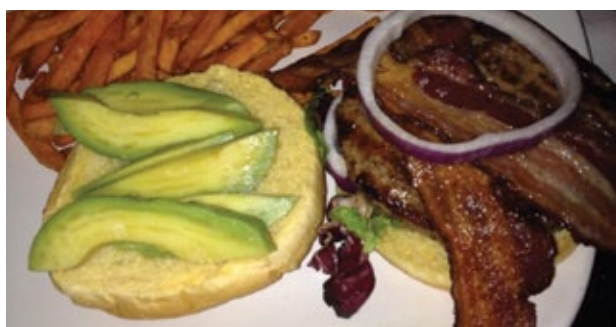
Take his soups for instance. The Curried Carrot is a subtle blend of carrots with fresh cream with toasted pumpkin seeds on top. His Baked



French Onion combines rich beef broth with sherry, garlic croutons and Grand Baby Swiss.



The appetizers are all masterpieces. The Coconut Shrimp combines the flavors of coconut with pineapple relish and sweet Thai chili sauce. The Crab Cakes are accompanied by a Mango Salsa and his own version of Rémoulade (ray-muh-LAHD). This is a mayonnaise based sauce flavored with Dijon mustard, capers and herbs. It is not quite traditional because it does not include chopped gherkins or anchovies Yag deems unnecessary. Gina's Deviled Eggs are my favorite appetizer. The egg yolks are delightfully smooth and just the right amount of bacon and ranch dressing is added so as not to overpower the taste of the eggs. Mushrooms are stuffed with herb cream cheese. Crimini mushrooms are used because they are more intensely flavored than typical white buttons.



The bar food is decidedly upscale too. The Chicken Italiano sandwich contains grilled chicken covered with a Pesto Aioli. Eggplant Parmesan is a sandwich made with fried eggplant, provolone, garlic, and crushed oven-dried tomatoes. Even the Grilled Cheese is a splendid use of flavors with Cheddar and Swiss Cheese, Bacon supplied by Weber Meats, Canadian Bacon, caramelized onions, and tomatoes on sourdough bread. Then there is Yag's Burger: Angus Beef, Avocado, Balsamic marinated onions, bacon, and blue cheese on a Brioche (bree-osh) bun. This is French yeast bread enriched with eggs and butter.



All the entrées are as unusual as they are delicious. The Macaroni and Cheese with Scallops is an outstanding dish. Seared Divers Scallops from Chesapeake Bay are never frozen. They are served with a cheddar cream sauce



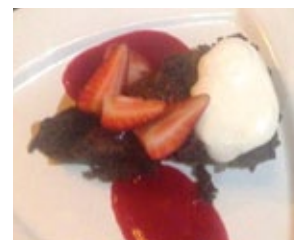
with White Truffle Oil mixed into Cavatappi (kah-vah-tap-pee) pasta. Fun Fact: Cavatappi is Italian for corkscrew. The Pork Flat Iron Steak with Bourbon Apple Cider Glaze is fantastic. I have never seen this cut of pork on a menu before. Chicago Meat Authority is the first and only company to supply

restaurants with Pork Flat Iron Steak. I am so impressed with it I spoke with Alana Heber, Marketing Manager, at this Chicago company. She explained these gigantic pork steaks are carefully cut from the pork picnic which is the lower part of the pig's shoulder. Only top quality lean, premium pork is selected resulting in tender, juicy steaks that taste best when grilled. At Gina's the Ribeye Steak is not just a plain steak. It is served with Truffle Butter. A truffle is the fruity body of an underground fungus that grows near certain tree roots. It is sort of like a mushroom and is very expensive. Some truffle species are highly prized as a delicious food. In this case fresh, high quality creamery butter is infused with finely chopped pieces of truffle to make Truffle Butter.

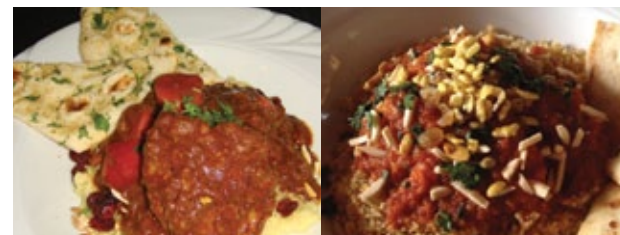


The Walleye is crusted with cornflakes and served with Maple Lemon Butter. The Mediterranean Chicken combines chicken

breast with tomatoes, artichoke hearts, Kalamata olives, feta cheese and fresh oregano over fettuccini pasta. The Shrimp Linguini combines tomatoes, Kalamata olives, spinach, garlic, basil and parmesan over linguini pasta.



The desserts are all made in-house. They are the tasty Apple Crisp, the marvelous Austrian Cottage Cheese Cheesecake, the magnificent Chocolate Flourless Cake and the most splendid Crème Brûlée I have ever enjoyed.



Indian Cuisine night is every Wednesday. In addition to the regular menu Yag prepares a dinner specialty from the country of his ancestors. Last week I enjoyed tender, exotic spicy curried lamb chops served with cranberry and slivered almonds couscous.

Friday night is Fish Fry. Cod is coated with breading made from the recipe courtesy of former Timbers Restaurant owners Suzanne and Keith Buchert. Savory Prime Rib is served on Saturday nights when you might want to stay late to listen to live entertainment from 10 pm to close.



Sunday Brunch is served from 9 am to 2 pm. Here you have an opportunity to visit a cool place thereby turning any Sunday into a holiday. Order the Gina's Classic: eggs, bacon or sausage and roasted potatoes, or a Ham and Cheese Omelet. Or be more adventurous by trying the house-made Crepes with Nutella, Quiche Lorraine with goat cheese, Shrimp Linguine, Mediterranean Salmon Salad, or Mac and Cheese with White Truffle Oil.



The real stars of the Brunch are the Eggs Benedict. Choose the Classic with Canadian Bacon, or the Crab Cakes or the Steak. The Benedicts are drizzled with a truly elegant Hollandaise (ohl-lahn-dez) French sauce made from the emulsification

of butter, egg yolks and lemon juice. Only an expert chef can produce Hollandaise this good.

Gina's Restaurant & Bar has only been open a year and already it has a reputation for Exceptional Cuisine. It won't be long before Yag fulfills his dream of receiving one of those highly prized Michelin Stars!

GINA'S RESTAURANT & BAR

45 N. Second Street, Platteville, WI 53818

608-348-6505 • GinasPlatteville.com

[Facebook.com/GinasRestaurantAndBar](https://www.facebook.com/GinasRestaurantAndBar)

Bar Hours: Tue–Thu: 4 PM–2 AM; Fri–Sat: 4 PM–2:30 AM; Sun: 9 AM–2 PM; Mon: Closed

Kitchen Hours: Tue–Thu: 4 PM–10 PM; Fri–Sat: 4 PM–11 PM; Sun: 9 AM–2 PM; Mon: Closed

Dining Style: Casual

Noise Level: Comfortable

Recommendations: Coconut Shrimp, Crab Cakes, Gina's Deviled Eggs, Curried Carrot Soup, French Onion Soup, Yag's Burger, Cornflake Crusted Walleye, Osso Bucco, Pork Flat Iron Steak, Macaroni & Cheese, Mediterranean Chicken, Shrimp Linguine, Friday Fish Fry, Saturday Prime Rib, Cheesecake, Crème Brûlée

Liquor Service: Full Bar

Prices: \$8–\$26

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, No Checks

Accessibility: Front Door–Yes, Restrooms–No

Kids Policy: Menu, High Chairs, Boosters

Reservations: Yes and recommended

Catering: No • **Take Out:** Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: On Second Street and Municipal Lot off Oak Street in back of building