

# AN ALLIANCE WORTH SAVORING

BY DANIEL CAPPELLO



**KNOWN BY TITLE** alone, Marquis de Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier was the wealthy nobleman who voluntarily left France to join General George Washington's army. Wounded at Brandywine, he became a living symbol of the Franco-American alliance that led to Great Britain's defeat. So Laura Auricchio reminds us in her recently published *The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered* (Knopf).

Though best remembered as the triumphant young man Washington considered an adopted son, the marquis, Auricchio explains, went on to know many disappointments in his life. Tapped by Parisians to head up the National Guard after the fall of the Bastille, Lafayette proved less revolutionary than

presupposed, and fled France during tumultuous times for present-day Belgium, where he was imprisoned as an enemy of the king of the Austrian Netherlands. He eventually won freedom and returned to La Grange, his chateau outside Paris, where he abandoned hopes of regaining popular favor in France and focused instead on his legacy in America. Part of that public-relations campaign involved a sort of welcome-home-heroes trip to America from 1824 to 1825, the same year New York real-estate impresario John Jacob Astor rechristened a stretch of Manhattan land he owned as "Lafayette Place" to commemorate the war hero—which sold lots and made Astor a fortune.

Today we know that stretch of land as Lafayette Street, and



it's only fitting that a French-inspired institution-in-the-making should now occupy a plum piece of real estate there. In a city rife with French brasseries promising to transport New Yorkers to Paris, it's easy to roll your eyes at the cliché. But when that brasserie is named Lafayette, heroic reputations are at stake—and a closer look is well merited.

Opened exactly two years ago, Lafayette is an everyday *grand café* and bakery (the bakery just launched an e-commerce site) under the direction of chef and owner Andrew Carmellini, whose market-driven menu is a worldly homage to the French genre in a setting that speaks to the essentiality of the French

of regions that results in a softer re-mastery of French cuisine and comfort food. From Atlantic oysters to Atlantic cod, from classic chicken *rôti* and duck *au poivre* to spaghetti *Nicoise* and prime beef tartare “New Orleans” (read: Tabasco aioli), this menu is familiar but wholly new and memorable.

It might seem shameful to reduce all of this to a seemingly silly fry, but there's ample reason to do just that. At about the same time that France gave us the original Lafayette, she also gave us the concept of the French fry—that delectably thin cut of potato deep-fried to crispy perfection (and served as a novelty in the Jefferson White House). Where and how French fries, or



condition: eating for pleasure. Together with his partners Luke Ostrom and Josh Pickard (of Locanda Verde and The Dutch fame), Carmellini created a timeless space—a cinema-worthy setting complete with mahogany floors, caramel leather banquettes, towering arched windows overlooking NoHo streets, and tiled columns supporting 16-foot-high ceilings. A zinc bar built in the French tradition is backed by fluted amber glass that glows all day and night, centered by a large antique station clock that provides a glimpse through its mechanicals into the Salle Privée, a small private dining room, on the opposite side.

The food's as fine as any you'd find in Paris or Provence, in Lyon or on the Ligurian coast. Carmellini's menu spans a variety

*frites*, were originally conceived or perfected remains debatable, but one thing's for sure: the fries at Lafayette are so perfect, the restaurant's reputation could stand on their merit alone (coupled with a glass of Château Franc Laporte). *Vive Lafayette*, indeed—and long live the Franco-American alliance. ♦

***This page, from top left: The restaurant is housed in an iconic Henry J. Hardenbergh–designed building; inventive oysters; a cocktail; the bar; a prepared seafood dish. Opposite page: The vibe is modern brasserie. Lafayette: 380 Lafayette St. (at Great Jones St.), breakfast and dinner daily, lunch weekdays, and brunch on weekends, with bakery open daily and for online orders at [lafayetteny.com](http://lafayetteny.com); reservations: 212.533.3000.***