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# Colour Me Happy

## If you like tapas, you'll like Jaroblue, a slick new establishment on the 17th avenue strip

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Seventeenth Avenue S.W. is an eye-plugging clutter of signs and shops, dotted on both sides of the road with pubs, cheque-cashing joints, ski shops, bakeries and urban boutiques. It's an active, annoying-to-drive, pain-to-park stretch of real estate. But, oddly, this irregularity is its most attractive aspect.

There isn't enough of this catch-as-catch-can, multi-era architecture around Calgary. And as parts of 17th are mowed down — so long Sultan's Tent, à bientôt Laurier Lounge, fond memories, Mercury Lounge\* — and replaced by more-linear structures, it's losing part of that eclectic charm.

Yet into this tumultuous milieu charged Jared Seifrit and Robin Lokhorst astride nostril-flared wild horses, claiming a down-at-the-heels pied-à-terre as their own.

Too dramatic? Maybe. But look inside Jaroblue and tell us it isn't true.

These guys have laid it out, creating a restaurant with style and attitude. They took a dull rectangular space, tricked it out in sultry earth tones and lit it subtly with dozens of dim lights and candles. They added immense, sepia-toned photographs by New York photographer Roberto Dutesco of the wild horses of Sable Island (ergo the wild horse reference) as the key visual impact of the room. And impactful they are, considering Jaroblue is only 17 feet wide.

Seifrit and Lokhorst lined the space with long banquettes, pulled in tiny bistro tables, plunked a deck on the outside to block the sound and sight of traffic and set up their big blue-and-white Jaroblue sign.

So, what is Jaroblue? It's a catchy and kitschy name, for sure. The "Ja" is for Jared, the "ro" is for Robin and the "blue" is for, well, blue. They like blue.

Jaroblue is part lounge, part contemporary tapas bar, part urban hangout. Mission One —

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the look — was accomplished by the owners in consultation with designers Walker McKinley and Amanda Whelan of McKinley Dang Burkart Design Group.

Even the marble-lined washrooms with their communal wash-up area ooze chicness. Job done. And the food? Seifrit called on a chef he had worked with at The Living Room — another hip, urban, 17th Avenue joint — and asked him to join the team. Jonas Hamre, a young talent, became a partner and executive chef, putting together a contemporary tapas menu to match the tone of the room.

Contemporary tapas? The genre of “con-temporary tapas” is still under construction, and must always be, in order to be called contemporary.

The idea is to offer a wide variety of items, all smallish and reasonably priced (here, between \$8 and \$15 each), for customers to share. Often this concept fails, largely because the chef isn't creative enough with the ideas or skilled enough to pull them off.

But Hamre is both creative and skilled, and his menu works. His seared beef tenderloin with potato rosti and ginger demi-glace (\$15) is one fine piece of beef. His duck confit and risotto croquettes with pineapple chutney (\$13) is crunchy-oily-acidy goodness. His merlot-strawberry pâté with balsamic bread pudding chips (\$13) is odd, but it works, especially with the chips. And the molten maple cake with white chocolate ganache and dried cherries (\$7) is a sublime melding of maple, white chocolate and cherries.

Jaroblue would not be complete without service. With Seifrit running that side of the business, Jaroblue is as comfortable as a well-worn rumpus room.

His staff are all pros, but, more importantly, they are nice people.

Fun people. People who are happy to have you at their place, enjoying the food, the wine and the tone.

And what of Robin Lokhorst, the “ro” and final member of the Jaroblue troika? He's the man behind the scenes, working an alternate day job in the local legal community and helping out when and where he can.

That's Jaroblue. A new crusader for 17th-Avenue uniqueness and urbanity. A fresh start for an old location. A concept executed well from end to end. A restaurant that just works.

\*All of these restaurants have found new locations in the city. While Mercury is still on 17th, it is at a new location.

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